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Y o u n g D o c t o r

THE YOUNG DOCTOR was the prize-winning novel in a £2000 competition for first novels organised jointly in America by the publishing house of Dodd, Mead, and the Redbook Magazine.

As a provocative novel about doctors, it is in a way an American **CITADEL**. As the story of one young doctor in particular, of his love affairs as well as his career, it will be read for its human interest. But its greatest strength, perhaps, lies in its amazing inside picture of the life of a hospital, of its "cares" and the human and social problems which they represent. The author herself spent several years on the staff of a big hospital, so she writes from first-hand knowledge.

Doctors will find this novel honest if disturbing. Patients (who make up the rest of the world) will find some surprising diagnoses of their own troubles.

By the Same Author

A GREAT DAY

DOCTOR MALLORY

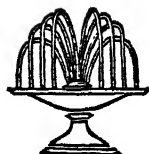
DOCTOR BILL

HEALING HANDS

ARMY DOCTOR

YOUNG DOCTOR

by
ELIZABETH SEIFERT



COLLINS

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Chapter One

THE MIRROR gave back an image impeccably groomed. Tweeds, their informality balanced by shirt collar neatly held down, dark tie accurately knotted. A fold of very white handkerchief in the breast pocket.

"All you need," drawled a voice from the bed in one corner, "is a caduceus in one hand to be a model for all young doctors."

"Shut up! I'm about to be interviewed for a job. Courtesy of Doctor Celoud, which seems to satisfy them on the professional side. But they want to look me over."

The young man in hospital whites checked off: "Item. One hopeful medico in excellent state of preservation. Name, Anthony Eeeeeee-velyn McNeill, known by his merciless friends as Annie. Age, 28. Nationality, Canadian, with a little blue blood thrown in. Height, six feet. Weight, 170. Eyes, blue. Head, *dolicho*. Heart, fluttering; expression, earnest. Assets, one very good general medical, surgical, and o.b. training. One brand-new professional conscience, with set of ethics to match. Hospital uniforms, and a limited supply of other wearing apparel. Superlative manners, with first-rate attachments for the personal relationship. Cash——"

"One dollar and sixty-five cents, and a one-way ticket to Darcey, Missouri," finished Tony McNeill.

"Optimist! And you could have had a teaching fellowship here at Boone. What's so wonderful about Darcey?"

"If I get the job, it means I get started in practice. Modern practice, in a hospital. No worrying about bills, no bowing and scraping, no handholding, no nursing along rich neurotics. Darcey's a small town and a farming community. That means they really need good men, there's really good work to do. I'll learn a lot, and I can save up to start my own hospital some day."

"Deliveries, tonsillectomies, fractures. . . . One long humdrum. You'll bog down in petty routine. An appendectomy will be a high-water mark. You're wasting a darn good surgeon, Tony. In ten years you'll be a fussy country doctor, with a halo around your head but not much science left inside. And you'll marry the banker's daughter and settle down to bridge and purgatives."

"I don't see why a country doctor can't be a first-rate man," Tony said resentfully. "My father was, and he was

a general practitioner, too. The city hospitals are full of good men. It's the country places that need them most. . . . My grandfather left a Harley Street practice to go way out in the wilds of Canada, because he heard that women there were having their babies like animals. My father used to keep posted, visit the European clinics. . . . He planned to bring the best in medicine and surgery within the reach of his people. We were going to set up a hospital together."

"All right, Annie," said Breaker, more gently. "Good luck to you. I'll keep the home fires burning in the lab."

Small towns look their best, and their busiest, on a morning in early spring. Tulips parade gaily down the walks, bridal wreath foams in front of every scrubbed porch. The women are getting about their house-cleaning, and blankets wave gay banners on every clothesline. The gloomy railroad station, the cluttered main street of the town. . . . Tony soon forgot them for the more colourful residence streets. The houses were all more or less alike, their yards planned on the same pattern; the people themselves bore family resemblances to each other; even the dogs seemed to be generally of the small, terrier type. Amused, Tony recalled the little pasteboard village he had once possessed as a child. Darcey was like that village. Uniform typical.

The taxi deposited him before an impressive building that looked as if it had originally been a family mansion. There was a deep, pillared porch, and rocking chairs tipped back against the wall. Long wings had been added to east and west; Tony could pick out the wide-paned windows and skylight of the operation room on the second floor.

As he went up the steps, the wide front door swung open. A solemn, blue-black person in a long white coat, buttoned to the chin, came out on the hospital porch. Something funereal about this man reminded Tony of the morgue and the cadaver vats—until the fellow smiled. "Good mo'nin', boss. Kin I tote yor satchel?"

"Er—no. Thanks a lot. I'll just leave it right here by the door. I may be going right out again."

In an office to one side of the central hall, an attractive girl was busy with a typewriter. She looked up inquiringly. "Yes?"

"I wanted to see Doctor Gordon."

"Doctor Gordon is operating. Would you like an appointment?" Friendly, impersonal she reached for a pad.

A bell rang in the upper hall—two sharp, insistent notes of warning. Then hurrying feet, and the unmistakable sounds of a cart being wheeled along. "They're through," said Tony confidently.

"Yes, but I can't promise you'd see Doctor Gordon."

"Can't I wait? I'm Doctor McNeill. If you would tell Doctor Gordon I'm here . . . I think he expects to see me."

"Will you wait in the parlour, please?"

Celoud had said Westwood was a model for all small, privately run hospitals. Maybe that statement had not been meant to include the parlour; or perhaps it should look like this. It was an octagonal room with a deep bay window jutting out beyond the end of the front verandah. The walls were distempered a warm buff. Corot reproductions, framed on wide white mats, were hung at eye level. A rug of some indeterminate brown covered most of the floor. The rest was waxed to a high, dark polish. A long, narrow table, stained mahogany, was set lengthwise of the rug, and on its precise centre sat a small bowl containing a very bright artificial fern. There were a dozen chairs—pseudo Windsor, pseudo mahogany—genuinely uncomfortable. Young Doctor McNeill tried one or two, then concentrated on looking out of the window.

The funereal black was sluicing the verandah down with a hose. The sun gleamed warmly on the wet stone steps. A long white walk bisected the lawn, green and plushy as velvet even this early in the year, and the new leaves of the trees cast delicate flecks over it. At the far end of the lawn there was a low stone wall. Beyond that the street, with a house or two opposite. A sign in one advertised rooms. A convenience—the hospital must be a mile at least from the hotels.

"Are you any relation to Emma Ackerman?"

The question hit him squarely between the shoulders and he turned so hurriedly he nearly slipped from the chair. He had been only vaguely aware of the three women who sat whispering in the bay window. One of them was smiling politely at him. The others leaned forward with intense interest.

"Eh? I beg your pardon?"

"I asked if you was kin to Miz' Ackerman. Miz' Emma Ackerman of College Hill."

The young man shook his head. "No, I'm sorry."

"You favour her some. I heard she was pretty bad sick." There wasn't any answer, and she didn't wait for one. "I'm waitin' on an op'ration," she went on. "My man's upstairs now. Doctor Gordon's op'rating. This is my sister, and this is our preacher's wife, Miz' Randall."

Tony smiled and bowed pleasantly. "I hope everything will be all right," he said.

"It all rests with God." That was Miz' Randall. She intoned the words solemnly. He looked at his wrist watch.

"He's been on the table three hours," the sister-in-law declared, pride and awe in her tone. Tony said nothing.

YOUNG DOCTOR

The cart had come out thirty minutes ago, and the patient on it was alive.

"You got somebody sick here?"

"No."

"I thought maybe, waitin' and all . . ."

"I am waiting to see Doctor Gordon."

"Land, *you* ain't sick! Still, I don't know . . . high colour don't always mean health." (Cheeks like apples. They'd been saying that to him all his life. And those fool internes had called him Annie.)

"Doctor Gordon's a real good doctor," one of the crones went on. "Lots of people don't like the way he talks—he's got a sharp tongue—but I notice when real sickness comes they all hunt him up. He's been real nice to my husband; calls him Jim, like he'd knowed him all his life. Last night the two of them sat talkin' rabbit huntin' jes' as if maybe it warn't Jim's last night on earth." Her voice broke, and the two other women patted her hands.

"Your husband's all right," Tony spoke up hastily. "If anything were wrong, you'd have known by now."

"Are you sure?"

"Of course."

Just then a nurse came down the stairs and into the room. She was smiling. "You can come up now, Mrs. Brooks."

"Is he—Jim——"

"Just fine. And almost awake. Your friends can wait up in the sunroom if they like."

The three women bundled upstairs. The nurse turned to the young man. "Are you Doctor McNeill?"

"Yes."

"Doctor Gordon said he'd see you in his office." She led the way down the central hall, and into a long dim corridor. Past a floor desk with a call board above it. Past several rooms giving brief glimpses of patients mounded under smooth white spreads. Everything in spotless order. Lysol in this hall—maternity beds probably. They stopped at the last door. Nervously Tony buttoned his coat, straightened his tie. The nurse knocked, opened the door, stepped aside.

A tall man in white rose from the desk and extended his hand. He had a firm, warm grip. "Sorry you were kept waiting," he rasped hoarsely. "Won't you sit down?" Tony took the chair beside the desk. The room and the man were of a piece. Gordon was large, heavy-shouldered, ruddy. His hair was quite grey around the temples. His eyes very blue behind polished pincenez. He sat behind a scarred old desk, clean of papers. One wall was banked with thick medical books and rows of journals. The window was curtained plainly in white. Gordon leaned back in his chair, his hands clasped behind his head.

"Doctor Celoud wrote to me about you, Doctor McNeill."

"Doctor Celoud has been very kind to me, sir."

"He gave an excellent account of your work at Boone." His tone indicated that he knew what a recommendation from Celoud meant. "What I want here," he went on, "is an assistant surgeon."

"I was general surgery interne for two years at Boone."

"Boone usually asks its internes to specialize."

"Yes, sir. I did—in a way. I mean, nominally, I went in for abdominal. But as interne, I did general surgery."

"Have you had much o.b. work?"

"Yes, sir. Quite a lot. I had a feeling I wasn't getting enough o.b. in medical school. Doctor Celoud knew it and was always grand about letting me know when he was doing something special. Quite often he'd let me assist."

"Are you English, McNeill?"

"Canadian, sir."

"Oh, yes. Your college was McGill. I saw a lot of Canadians in Belgium and France. Mere boys, most of them. How old are you?"

"Twenty-nine my next birthday, sir."

"You look younger."

"I lost two years when my father died. There wasn't much left even after his practice was sold. Mother had to be taken care of; and my brothers said I'd already had an expensive education."

"So you're a doctor's son."

"Yes, sir. He was just a general practitioner."

"I'd call myself a general practitioner," said Gordon sharply.

"I'm proud of my father, sir. I like to think I'm like him—and my grandfather. I still have the books my grandfather kept. They're curiosities. I used to go round with my father, on vacations. After I was in medical school, he let me help. We were going to build our own hospital out there in the country—that's why I worked in surgery. A small place, but perfectly efficient. We planned to put the best in medicine and surgery within the reach of those people." Canada was a wash of pink across the map. The fragrant country roads, the sharp sunlight, the wide, blue sky, had all sunk into an oblong of earth covered with dusty grass.

"Let me show you this place," said Gordon, and rose. "This is a general hospital," he went on as Tony followed him into the hall. "The surgery is everything from a mashed finger to mastoiditis. We serve this town and the surrounding neighbourhood and industries. There's a paint factory and some chemical plants and a shoe factory. We get practically the whole run of medical and surgical problems. We have eighty beds—fifty surgical and thirty medical. Our internist is Doctor Flannery. He owns ten

per cent of the hospital, and I own the rest. The A.M.A. gives us first rating in our class."

Upstairs, the hall was white with sunlight. On one side were the unmistakable doors of an operating room. Opposite, a white-tiled room, with an examination table, sterilizers, a dressing cart. Down the hall was the nurses' desk, and visitors sitting in the sunroom. Doctor Gordon walked briskly along the halls, his step had military snap. The operating room was completely equipped and thoroughly modern. Not quite so much glass and chromium as in the newer hospitals of the Boone group, but orderly and aseptic. Tony admired the overhead lights.

"I put a certain percentage of the hospital earnings back into equipment," Gordon said. "My idea is that Westwood shall be small only in size. In service and efficiency, it is distinctly big-time. First-class equipment, and first-class men." He introduced Tony to the anæsthetist, an eyeglassed woman of middle age. "Miss Gates." Tony met the laboratory technician, and the nurses—all registered, with a high average of youth and attractiveness. Then Miss Ward, the supervisor, and in the diet kitchen, Esther, the cook. The solemn negro, he found, was named Asy. Gordon told him as they went along much of how the hospital had been built up, what changes he had made, how the X-ray room had been installed.

"We're kept pretty busy here," said Gordon, as they swung down the lower hall to Flannery's office.

"You see, we want to have our service as good as any, and still keep it financially within the reach of the people of this community. Right now it's cheaper to be sick at Westwood than to pay doctors and nurses at home. And an appendectomy here costs much less than a trip to a St. Louis hospital. Our rate of recovery is high, too. Of course, we can't do as much free work as an endowed institution can manage, but we do see a lot of poor patients—and we do the best we can by them. I expect I'm a hard man to work for—sometimes pretty rough and plain-spoken too; building up a thing like this, one forgets how to pay compliments, but there's nothing I appreciate more than good work."

"I don't mind work," said Tony as they came to Flannery's door.

It was a pleasant room, luxurious in contrast to Gordon's. Flannery might be as old a man as the chief, but he seemed much more youthful. He was thinner, shorter, and had the characteristic medical stoop. There was an air of gaiety about him none the less, with a touch of malice emphasized by his short nose and greenish-grey eyes. He stood up and extended his broad hand, the back shadowed with strong black hair.

"Most happy to meet you, Doctor McNeill. So you're Celoud's prodigy. Smoke?"

"Not just now, thank you."

"Well, what do you think of Westwood?" He sat back in his chair and regarded the ceiling.

"It seems all it should be, Doctor Flannery."

"I remember how it looked to me, when I came here from the State prison."

"Tom!" protested Gordon.

"Oh, Doctor McNeill is too polite, I'm sure, to assume I was an inmate. As a matter of fact, Doctor Gordon saved me from the disgrace of being fired because I had the wrong ideas."

"I took you to save my own self from disgrace," said Gordon, amused. "When I came to Westwood," he explained to Tony, "it was operated by a Doctor Carter. Splendid businessman, Doctor Carter. I bought a half interest—he was old and ready to retire from active practice. I found out this hospital was being used as a kind of—clearing house by the Darcey doctors. Some pretty startling things went on under the auspices of Westwood Hospital. I couldn't possibly work under such conditions, so I declared that patients brought to Westwood must be surrendered to the care and discretion of the staff doctors."

"Of course," agreed Tony.

"Never was there a larger overstatement, McNeill," laughed Flannery. "You see, Gordon was all the staff there was. All Carter knew was how to give castor oil. So he took me out of jail to save his face."

"And now the staff expands again," said Gordon to Tony; "that is, if you want to stay."

"Let me sell you Gordon as boss," Flannery grinned. "He's a Harvard medical man, two years interne, one year Rockefeller research, four years in war hospitals, one year in European clinics. Member of the American College of Surgeons. He's been here twelve years. Darcey is scared to death of him, especially the medicos; but the whole town comes here to be salvaged. Moreover, he barks. And language—dear, dear!"

"I don't suppose one answers back," smiled Tony.

"As to Darcey"—Flannery grinned and went on—"the less said the better. You're young and handsome, and the town's full of roving eyes. Also, there's the social position of the doctor. Gordon's an old Puritan; if you get in trouble, he'll throw you out in the howling storm."

"Thanks, I'm not having any," said Tony.

"It's a small town, just swarming in gossip," Gordon said. "That's one reason I want an outside man. I want the hospital kept clean of all that. We tend to our business and they tend to theirs. As for the doctors, we try to stay

on terms of strict professional courtesy with them; but the less I see of most of them, the better I like it."

"I'd like to try the job, sir," Tony said. "It seems to be just what I wanted."

"I can't pay you much to start. Twenty-five dollars a week, room, board, laundry. Or you can live out, if you like. You would assist me in the operating-room, and help Flannery in the out-patient clinic. Don't take my puritanism too seriously. Have your friends, your good times. I expect you're the sort who can make many friends."

"I—can make an ass of myself with the best of them. But I'll thank you to remind me if I show any signs of neglecting my work."

"Hurroo!" Flannery got up out of his chair and jagged a step or two. "Can I kiss you, Tony?"

"Tony thinks you're a fool, Tom," laughed Gordon.

"Tony will understand my emotion once he begins to retract for you." All three men were laughing now, glad they had established a friendship so early. Somebody knocked at the door.

It was a nurse summoning Doctor Flannery. Gordon took his new assistant back to his own quarters, showed him the room across the hall which would be Tony's, gave him a key to the bath they would share. "You can get settled in, eat lunch—Asy will bring you a tray. I do out-patients at two-thirty in the dressing-room. I'll see you then."

He was off down the hall at a brisk pace. Tony went into his room—a pleasant corner one, with windows facing east and north. The mattress on the high bed was a good one; Gordon had promised him a desk. Asy could help him put up his bookshelves when Breaker sent on his boxes; this would make a home, and a darned good one.

At two-thirty on the dot, Tony, refreshed with a shower and an excellent lunch, reported to Gordon. He had checked all the danger points of his regalia—cuff edges, coat collars, smudged shoes—and saw gladly Gordon's nod of approval. They went into the dressing-room. "How many?" Gordon asked Miss Gates.

"Six dressings, and a pelvic."

They went to work at once. Tony made the dressings, with Miss Gates assisting efficiently. Once, when Doctor Gordon was called to the phone, she spoke to Tony.

"I've been at Westwood twenty years," she said almost belligerently.

"I'll bet it seems longer."

"I've been with Doctor Gordon as long as he's been here. He's a wonderful surgeon. You'll learn a lot from him."

Tony laughed. "We'd better be friends, Gates."

"It's up to you."

Doctor Gordon came back. "I'll take Mrs. Langtry now." Tony followed as he made rounds. He was introduced to each patient, and every one had to be reassured that Gordon was not going away. "If you weren't here at Westwood," one mother said, "I'd not have a minute's peace—what with roller skates and football and all, and so many accidents on the streets." Gordon laughed warmly. Tony listened, alert for scraps of information that would help him chart his course; in a place like this, personal attitude would count as much as all the surgical skill he possessed.

He tore off the old straps on Mrs. Langtry's incision, studied the cut. His hand stretched out for alcohol and cotton, sponged gently, firmly peeled off the last of the straps. His hand stretched out again—to emptiness.

"Straps!" he barked at the nurse.

She jumped, a slow tide of colour sweeping her sallow face and thin neck. She looked at Doctor Gordon. His eyeglasses flashed. "Get these straps!" he cried. "You knew he'd need straps. Hurry up!"

Tony kept his eyes on his work. If Gordon ever yelled at him like that, he'd shrivel like a dead leaf—or snap back at him. No, he wouldn't. He'd take it. Still, he was sorry. He yapped at student nurses like that himself. He placed the thin folds of gauze with precision, took the straps, and was very particular about how he placed them, rubbing each edge down firmly. He smiled at the patient. "Miss Gates will help you dress." Something in his voice indicated that he and Miss Gates were in close partnership.

"Will you see Mrs. Gilbert now, Doctor?" she asked when they were through. "Doctor Herbert has brought her in for a pelvic."

Gordon sighed faintly. Curious, Tony watched his face. In a place like this, one must get to know quite a lot about the patients who were brought in—and even more about the doctors who brought them.

Herbert turned out to be a short, sandy, self-important little man. He had a bustling walk, and a pronounced cast in one eye. Always this deflection was to make Tony uneasy in Herbert's presence. Gordon introduced McNeill.

"I didn't know the hospital wanted another doctor," said Herbert, surprised. "It so happens——"

"We needed a surgeon," Gordon's voice was suave. "I knew you were very busy with your town practice. Tell us about Mrs. Gilbert."

Herbert's queer eyes shifted to the table where Miss Gates was draping a sheet. "Uterine hæmorrhage."

'Good Lord! Are you sure?'

"Oh, yes. Curetting will take care of it."

"Not if it's hæmorrhage," said Tony dryly, then wished he had kept quiet.

"Oh, yes," said Herbert loftily to Tony. "I know the case. Delivered her three children. Youngest now eight. When a man knows a patient like that, he's not apt to fall into a snap diagnosis. You youngsters know a lot of theory, but it's practice, my boy, makes a real family doctor," he finished with a nasty edge to his voice.

"Has she bled before, Herbert?" asked Gordon smoothly.

"Once, about a year ago. I curetted her then. But her husband insisted on Westwood this time."

"Did you examine the scrapings from your curettage?"

"Oh, it wasn't necessary. I've known the patient for years."

"Temperature, 99.3; pulse, 140; respiration, 20," Miss Gates reported.

"Excitement probably," Herbert said. "She's a little nervous—coming here to you."

"I'm the town bogeyman," murmured Gordon. "Will you make the examination, Doctor McNeill?"

Tony nodded. Here was his real test. While he prepared, he tried to think through the obscure cross-current of facts and emotions presented by the Gilbert-Herbert situation. Something was rotten in Denmark. The man was evidently one of the town's fashionable gynæcologists . . . Neglect, at the very least . . . And now, resenting the emergency that forced him to come to Westwood, he had frightened his patient, nervous enough with her illness, and needing badly to trust Gordon.

His examination was brief. Finished, he joined Gordon and Herbert in the hall. His eyes met Gordon's.

"Thank you, McNeill. Will you bring Mr. Gilbert upstairs? He's waiting in the parlour."

Tony ran down the stairs, three at a jump. He found Gilbert, grey, tired, frightened, among the visitors in the parlour. They all stared at Tony's unfamiliar face, his hospital clothes.

"Seen the boy wonder?" Miss Gates asked the floor nurse, in a guarded undertone.

"I saw something white flash by."

"That's him."

"Good-looking."

"Yes. Sort of. Full of himself."

"He'll need to be, to work with Gordon."

Tony stood, silent, at one side of the dressing-room, while Doctor Gordon explained to Mr. Gilbert his wife's condition, using one syllable words skilfully, and an equal amount of fact, to tell this frightened, well-meaning husband that child-birth is at best a violent process, that interfering with nature can be still more brutal—that any

abraded surface is a seat for infection, that the knife was the only possible thing that could now be used to arrest that infection. Gordon wasted no time in vain regrets; he knew it was too late to say, "If you had come to me sooner . . . If your doctor had been a better one . . ."

Half an hour later saw Gilbert leave with Doctor Herbert. Mrs. Gilbert had been settled quietly under Tony's supervision. They'd have to wait, of course, before they could operate. Tony found Gordon in Flannery's office. The two men weren't saying much, just sitting. Gordon seemed to be boiling mad. Flannery had the oddest expression of utter fatigue on his face; as if he wanted to cry, almost. Tony remembered that look afterward. He was to see it once or twice again on Tom's face.

Through the window, Tony saw a girl in a red coat, a small hat tilted over one eye, come out of the back entrance to the hospital and walk over to the garage. One of the nurses? Presently she backed out a small roadster and drove away. The broad lawn sloped serene behind the hospital. There was a small, vine hung cottage at the far end of it. Through the open doors of the long garage Tony could see the bonnet of a shiny black ambulance.

"So you met our Geheimrat Herbert," said Flannery at last.

"Yes. Am I suspicious, or is there something funny about this Gilbert case?" Tony asked hesitantly.

"Funny! Good God! It stinks to heaven!" exploded Gordon. "Curetted her last year. Known her too long to look at the scraping, then brings her in with a carcinoma discoverable digitally. The bastard ought to be shot!"

"Is Herbert a prominent man here in Darcey?" asked Tony.

"Pillar of the medical society," Gordon told him. "Biggest practice in town, too. But I didn't know he went so far as to clean up after Mattie."

"Mattie?"

"Mattie Jordan. She's an old coloured woman, a midwife. Abortions at ten dollars per. It seems Mrs. Gilbert thought she was pregnant, and they're pretty poor. So she went out to Mattie's and started bleeding—like the time before. Mattie must have got scared then too. This time either Herbert got the jitters himself, or Gilbert was too frightened . . ." Gordon was explaining to Tony, with suppressed fury in his ether-hoarsened voice. "I've made a hard-and-fast policy about these Jordan cases. Some of the town doctors take them on, but they know I won't cover up. This is the first one anybody has dared bring to me."

Abortionist . . . cover-up . . . Tony's head was whirling. "I thought there was a law, sir?" he said.

"Law! They wipe up each other's tracks like gangsters

—there's never any clear proof. And, besides, who knows what kind of political strings they pull?"

"Somebody ought to get on the trail of a woman like that!" Tony cried. "Why, she must be a menace to the whole community!"

"Listen, Galahad," said Flannery very slowly. "It isn't wise to rush in where angels fear to tread. Whoever starts trying to clean up Darcey will find himself in Siberia before you could think twice."

"But doctors should be responsible for the health of their patients," Tony cried. "It's like letting a dangerous carrier walk around loose."

"And there are dozens of them in Darcey," Flannery finished cruelly.

"The best we can do is to keep Westwood itself above-board and spotless," said Gordon gently. "That's enough of a job for three men."

"Well, I'm going home," Flannery rose, slipped out of his white coat. "Go, get yourself some air Tony. See the town, but don't open your eyes too wide—all at once. You'll have plenty of time to worry about the state of its health, and its morals."

"I'm going to do some reading," Gordon rose too. "I expect a walk would be a good idea, Tony. Asy will give you some supper when you come back. If we need you in the night you'll know about it. See you to-morrow—operating-room at eight."

Tony took the prescribed walk, carrying in his hand the letter he had written to Breaker.

"... No humdrum here, son. This is a battlefield if I ever smelled one. The town I mean. The hospital is fine. And Gordon—first water. Hard, Brilliant. Invaluable. Flannery is internist—I haven't him doped out yet. Wise guy, I'm sure. Both of them with nice professional consciences. I'm sure I hear you saying I must feel right at home. Well, so I do. What's more, I like the place."

It was early dusk; a few heavy clouds were gathering in the west. Tony walked along the sidewalks, between the rows of neat bungalows, looked as speculatively at the people he passed as they looked at him. They were to be *his* people, this to be *his* town. Coming into the business district he was again struck by the dirt and litter of the streets in contrast with the swept and burnished qualities of the residence districts. Pool halls, sour-smelling drug-stores, clotted close to the station. Negro boys—a gang of them—leaned against a smoke-stained building, its empty windows pasted with last summer's circus posters, and made audible comments about Tony. A slim mulatto girl, her face purple under a thick crust of pink powder. Tony

had to step to the gutter to avoid actual contact with her. The coloured boys yelled with derision. Tony put his letter in a post-box and turned back to the hospital. The tall trees, their limbs faintly feathered with new leaves, seemed beautiful and clean.

In bed, fairly early, Tony's brain whirled with all it had handled that day. The bed was too high. Gordon's voice hoarsened under ether. Tony's dad's had done that. Gordon was no more like Tony's dad than a great Dane is like a lean hound, but both men had the same clear eye, the same uncompromising way. Tony hoped he would please Gordon. There was a rubber sheet. Tony got up and yanked the dark, smelly thing out. Thought to hunt up his gown and sneakers in case of a call. He couldn't get the sheets and blankets back into their smooth, mitred corners. He knew how they should have looked. Tony hoped Flannery would never laugh at him, or despise him. Was he, Tony, too much of an idealist? But, Mattie Jordan . . .

Chapter Two

THREE DAYS or so after Tony's coming to Westwood, the three staff doctors had gathered—as was to become their custom—in Gordon's bare office after a morning of operations and dressings.

Miss Hall, Doctor Gordon's secretary, knocked briefly and came in. "I beg your pardon, Doctor Gordon, Mrs. Rhodes has broken her wrist. They're bringing her now."

"Mrs. Milford Rhodes? Oh, damn it!" Miss Hall slipped out under the upswEEP of his ready profanity.

"You go eat your dinner, Gordon" said Flannery, managing to put both soothing and malice into his voice. "I'll take Fanny through the preliminaries. McNeill, you come along and get a good taste of concentrated Darcey."

"I'll need a clean coat," Tony said, glancing down at his wrinkled coverall.

"She's a nymphomaniac—Mrs. Rhodes," Gordon explained, following Tony across the hall to his room. "She's a hundred and six at least. Wears bowknots and calls me David. The Duchess of Darcey—society page can't go to press without her name in it."

Tony climbed into clean ducks, fresh white shoes, a white coat. Brushed his hair, grinning at himself in the glass. She wouldn't call him David.

There was a commotion out in the main hall. A fussily dressed woman, well past middle-age, was being piloted in by three or four other women, evidently her excited friends. Her hand was pillowed on a little cushion of silks and

laces, and out of her mouth came anguished sounds worthy of a primipara in dry labour. Tony dodged back and went upstairs in the freight elevator. Gordon had shown him how to work it, explaining what a wonder it was for evading nagging relatives.

Flannery and a thin, quiet girl were getting the hysterical woman into her room. "Miss Taylor, Doctor McNeill, our new assistant," Flannery introduced, and finished: "Run along to your luncheon, Carolyn, and do take the rest of the nymphs with you. We'll look after your Aunt Fanny."

They got her coat off in a storm of "Oh, my poor crushed wrist. Doctor Gordon must take care of me himself. I know he'd never forgive himself if anything went wrong. Oh, my poor mangled..." The X-ray was accompanied by more of the same. Finally, the hypo... The doctors left her with the nurses, still screaming thinly. Ether would be anasthesia for every one.

"Whew!" said Tony as the door of her room swung shut. But it wasn't over. A man was arguing with the nurse at the call desk. Fortyish, pasty, soft as a toad, but dressed like a jaunty, unpleasant Brummel.

"Doctor Flannery!" His voice had the flat, brassy twang Tony had had in his ears these past few days. "I must see poor Fanny Rhodes. I hear she happened to have a terrible accident on her way to a luncheon party. She's one of my dearest friends."

"I thought Doctor Gordon had told you to keep out of Westwood, Jessie," said Flannery coolly. The man smiled. Tony disliked him on sight.

"I came to visit a dear friend, not in my professional capacity, Doctor Flannery." His raised voice penetrated the door apparently, for Mrs. Rhodes called, archly querulous, "Oh, there's Mr. Jessie! How dear and sweet of him to come. Mr. Jessie! Stay with me, please. I'm suffering so terribly."

"Mrs. Rhodes may not see any one until that fracture is reduced," Flannery said curtly. "Come here, McNeill. I want you to examine a piece of pathology. Mr. Jessie, this is our new assistant, Doctor McNeill."

Mr. Jessie took out a small notebook and pencil. "Oh, yes—he is really news," he smirked. "How do you spell your name?"

Flannery spelled it. While Jessie wrote, he went calmly on to Tony. "Jessie is the columnist of our local newspaper. Sometimes he thinks he's Winchell, sometimes Broun. Either way he's pretty bad."

"He has the skin of a crocodile," Flannery continued, "and the curiosity of a chimpanzee, both conditions not uncommon in Darcey. But Jessie is a highly developed case."

"Tell me something about yourself, Doctor McNeill," smiled Jessie, showing a mouthful of bad teeth.

"He comes to us from Boone," Flannery said. "That's all you need to know, Jessie. You aren't used to facts. Good-bye." He took Tony's arm and, as he went down the hall, instructed the call nurse, in full hearing of the visitor: "Next time that object shows up call Asy and have him thrown out. Doctor Gordon said he was not to be allowed on the premises. Prophylactic orders."

The wrist having been set without further excitement Gordon presented Tony with the rest of the day. "Such as it is—but even rainy fresh air won't hurt you."

Spring was turning a cold shoulder on Darcey. Inside, the hospital halls smelled of soup, with a faint overtone of phenol. Outside, a chilly, blowing rain spat against the steam-misted windows.

Tony was restless. After the tension of these first days, the excitement of settling into a new job, it would take time, he knew, for his nerves to quiet. Just now a little physical exercise would be the thing, even though the weather was terrible. His old tweed suit, brown pullover, his heavy-soled English boots would be right, he decided—with some heavy gloves, for his hands chapped easily from so much scrubbing.

Standing on the steps of the hospital, Tony contemplated the sprawling expanse of rain-soaked Darcey, and hesitated. But the rain seemed to be slackening. He thought he remembered at the edge of town a tree with bittersweet berries still red among its branches—it would be a welcome substitute for that awful artificial fern on the reception-room table.

Pulling his cap down over his eyes, and hunching his shoulders, Tony breasted the gale that swirled in, without let or hindrance, from the flat prairie, and headed down the street. Already it was growing dark, and again the skies released a heavy gust of rain.

Just as he reached the shelter of the underpass, a roadster swished by and drenched him with spray from the flooded gutter. As he stood cursing, he heard the brakes scream. The car backed recklessly—backed to where he stood, and stopped. A girl's vivid face peered out from under the canvas hood.

"Give you a lift?" she cried.

Tony pulled off his cap. "Thanks," he called. "I'm not going anywhere."

"Take you to the hospital?"

"No, I just came from there."

"Well, get in."

It was silly to argue at the top of his lungs. Tony got in. The girl touched her foot to the starter, and they shot

away. Tony turned to look at her curiously. She was small—short, that is. Her head was well below his. She wore no hat; her hair was soft and fine, and a vivid gold colour. Her skin was white and of good texture, but she was heavily rouged on lip and cheek. She wore a short jacket of grey squirrel, and a red knitted frock beneath it. She had on high heeled red slippers and gossamer-thin silk stockings. She was plumper than most girls are nowadays, and she sat close enough for him to feel her warmth and softness. She wasn't pretty, exactly. Her jaw was too heavy, and rather undershot, and she had an ugly brown mole on one cheek. But she knew how to accent every good point she had.

Well, there he was, driving somewhere in the rain with a strange girl. This, Tony reflected, was not what he had planned. Decidedly not. Remembering what Gordon and Flannery had said about Darcey's appetite for gossip, he frowned. At which the girl looked up at him, smiled, and then laughed heartily.

"Hallo, you," she said.

"Hallo. And you watch the road."

"Scared, are you?"

"Yes. And I'm not dressed for an accident."

The girl chuckled. "After all, though, in your own hospital——"

"See here, how do you know who I am? I don't know you."

She laughed. Her voice was husky, like that of a young boy.

"No, you wouldn't. But I know all about you."

"Nonsense! I've been in this town less than a week."

"So what?" You're Anthony Evelyn McNeill, Doctor Gordon's new assistant at Westwood, and Tom Flannery—he's a friend of mine—calls you Galahad. How's your muscle, Mr. G?"

Tony jerked his arm away. "Watch that wheel, you devil!" he yelled, as the car careened on two wheels, barely missing a telephone pole. "What is this, anyway? What you Americans call a kidnapping?"

"Snatch is the word, Sir Knight. Snatch."

Her eyes were now frankly provocative. "Nice, too, maybe," she murmured. "What do you say we find a quiet place and talk it over?"

She was *that* sort then. When the car came to a stop in a quiet side street, Tony sat grimly, and a little fatuously, with his arms folded. At which his companion chanted:

"His strength was as the strength of ten, because his heart—Boy, what wouldn't I give for a candid camera shot of *that*!"

There was nothing for Tony to do but laugh. Yes, it was funny. Who was funny? Again his vanity was aroused

when his companion applauded ironically. He wished he could think of something to say—to show her . . .

Tony's head banged against the canvas as the car sprang suddenly forward. When he recovered his balance, the girl was smiling sweetly up into his face.

"Even the pure in heart," she murmured, "might get ideas."

In an unfrequented corner of the park, the car slowed again to a stop.

"Okay," said the girl. "Now let's talk. I know all about you, but you don't know anything about me, so Marietta will now take the microphone. I'm Marietta Doyle, and I'm the town hussy, but in a nice way. Would you understand that, I wonder, or wouldn't you?"

Tony looked at her, deliberately. In detail. What sort of girl was this? Certainly no Maud Muller.

"I thought not," Marietta continued calmly, and a little wearily. "You know? I've met medical internes before. Anyway, let's get this straight, darling. I'm no worshipful little Florence Nightingale, always ready to do my good deed for suffering male humanity. And just for what you're thinking, how would you like to get out and walk?"

"I'm damned if I will!" Tony shouted indignantly. "This trip here was your idea. You'll take me back to town, or . . ."

To Tony's astonishment, this outburst was rewarded by a ravishing smile. Not only that, but Marietta, with something like a sigh, again moved her pleasant curves in his direction—a cuddling gesture which he found himself helpless to resist.

"Why, Tony," she murmured. "I do believe you've got something. And— Oh, you wouldn't understand. You haven't lived in Darcey. Of course, I suppose you do know a *little* about the facts of life—"

"Thanks," said Tony, grimly, feeling somehow that he was being put in the wrong.

"I know, Tony, but medics think so—anatomically. Full of themselves, they are, too. Now you, for instance, are so full of yourself, what with all the ether and medical ethics and what not you've swallowed, that you'd never have been able to see me, or any other woman for that matter. Why, I practically had to club you to get you even this far."

"Club me is about right," said Tony. "Not that I entirely disapprove; but, I must say, you work fast. For a nice girl."

Her grin was young and impish. "Of course, I'm a nice girl. What do you say about sitting perfectly quiet and having a little talk?"

Tony laughed helplessly. Whatever else he ever got from this girl it would not be *talk*. "All right. Let's talk. And

let me tell you this to start. I came to Darcey to practise surgery. I've got a good job from my point of view, and I want to keep it. But if you're a sample of the Darcey girls, I might as well take the night train back to Boone. I'm too young, too green. . . ."

Marietta laughed—a full-throated and altogether delightful laugh that both thawed his injured vanity and increased his confusion.

"Galahad, if I tried a little, I think I could like you, and maybe you'd end up by liking me. I've got a mean streak in me, of course. Nobody could be born and brought up in Darcey without being a little mean. But I'm not all mean and, like most women, I'm a setup for a handsome man."

She stopped, leaned forward to regard him—so close that he could see every structural detail of her wide blue eyes. "Why, how wonderful, Galahad! You don't know it, but you're the only male in Darcey over twenty-five who can still achieve an authentic blush. You've got a monopoly. I'm glad I didn't waste any time getting acquainted." Absently Marietta reached for his hand and caressed it gently. "How about my taking you home, now? I live only a few blocks from here and we can have a fireside chat and discuss all the local issues. Meanwhile, you might open the window—it's stopped raining. That way, you can cool off and recover your scientific poise."

"You're the doctor, Marietta," Tony said resignedly. "I'm all yours for the evening. Nothing can surprise me any more."

Within less than a mile they turned into the grounds of a sprawling Victorian house, painted yellow, with a ponderous red-tile roof and a hideous corner tower. The wide lawn sloped down into a small valley choked with undergrowth. Tony's companion stopped her car on the driveway, and they entered through the side door.

"Mother and Bobby went to Columbus," the girl said, dropping her jacket into a chair in the hall. The kindled hearth responded promptly to Marietta's match; Tony saw a big, homelike living-room, shabby at the edges from hard use. But he noticed, too, unmistakable signs of wealth and taste. A grand piano stood open in the next room, its rack filled with music. There were good etchings and prints on the walls, good books on the shelves. The Charles of London sofa was delightfully soft and luxurious. Tony stretched his boots to the fire. . . .

From Marietta, curled in an easy chair: "Want a drink. Galahad?"

"No, thanks. And I'll be obliged if you and Tom Flannery would stop calling me that ridiculous name."

She looked at him, considering the request.

"Smoke, Tony?"

"Not when my throat is raw with ether. But I'll be glad to light yours for you."

Marietta stared at him meditatively as he lit her cigarette.

"Six feet high. *Blonde*. Nice curls. Good shoulders and legs. Doesn't drink, but has normal male reflexes. House-broke—in fact, a gentleman equipped with everything, including a broad 'A' Oxford, Tony?"

"McGill. I'm Canadian. I truly can't help it if I speak English. I'll probably pick up the local argot in time. By the way, I take it this isn't a clinic? Thought you were going to tell me something about Darcey—and yourself. Are there any more at home like you?"

"Yes and no. My sister Bobby. Brother Arthur is in Kansas City. Also Mother and Dad. We're shanty Irish, you know—lace-curtain Irish, only you'll notice Mother doesn't like lace curtains. Still Dad was a section hand once, and Darcey never forgets. It's not a nice town. If I didn't hate it so, I suppose I might be a little nicer myself."

"That's interesting. Just how not-nice are you?"

"Can't say I blame you for being curious. Not nice enough to satisfy the old ladies of both sexes. Nice enough to have about anything I want in this town—if I could only bring myself to want it."

"Anything, meaning——"

"Men, or what goes by that name around here. They all have one of two ideas. Idea A: Marietta is a hot number, and ought to be easy for hardware clerks and deacons that have just discovered tourist camps. Idea B: Marietta is a good girl, a little wild—time she settled down to helping the church and raising a flock of kids."

"Idea B doesn't appeal to you?"

"Hell, no. I'm a school teacher—gang of thirty-five young whelps to take care of. And the church—Mother takes care of that."

"So what?"

"So I drive like hell when the weather is good—or when it isn't. So I go to parties and get tight because there isn't anything else to do, and——"

"So you pick up the new doctor the first chance he gives you. Just where am I going to fit into this picture?"

Marietta sat up, extinguished her cigarette, and said:

"Come here, Tony."

"I'm a surgeon. I've got work to do in this town."

"Come here, Tony."

Tony went to her with a sudden pulse hammering at his temples. She kissed him with firm, full lips—and as suddenly pushed him aside. She was astonishingly strong, he realized.

"But Marietta——"

"Sorry, Tony. It's my fault. Why do I have to let you

in for all the hell that Darcey has piled up in me? Come on, let's play some music. Sing?"

Tony had a pleasant baritone voice, and liked to sing. Marietta played unusually well, and the music served its purpose. It eased the tension. They ran quickly through a varied repertoire, ending with "The Man on the Flying Trapeze" and "Barnacle Bill the Sailor." They were still at the piano when Marietta's mother and sister came home from the luncheon-bridge at Columbus. Neither was surprised at finding Marietta with a guest. Could Doctor McNeill stay for supper? Daddy would be in on number nine.

So Tony had supper at the Doyles'. They were friendly and gay and casual, and Tony enjoyed himself very much. He liked the helter-skelter informality of the household, the frankness of word and opinion.

The father, Mike Doyle, was division manager for the railroad, it developed. That was a position of prestige in the town. Mike was a charming Irishman, with apple cheeks and a gay blue eye. His small, slender body was erect and lithe. He told Tony that he was seventy-five years old, long since due for retirement. He looked scarcely sixty. He told Tony, too, that he had been called from the schoolroom to fire an engine when he was only thirteen years old—he'd educated himself by a careful reading of the newspapers. He possessed a good knowledge of world affairs and places. He adored his family, and was audibly proud of his two handsome daughters. The oldest child, a son, was a practising physician in Kansas City. Tony imagined that he detected a note of reserve when Mike spoke of this son.

Mrs. Doyle was handsome, grey-haired, smartly dressed—younger by twenty years than her husband. It appeared that she was a musician, a clubwoman, and very active in church work.

"I have a good deal of freedom," she said complacently, "now that the children are grown and can take care of themselves."

"And *how* we take care of ourselves!" laughed Marietta's sister. Barbara, whom they called Bobby, was pretty in a dark, slim way—prettier than Marietta, but she lacked her elder sister's verve and colour. Tony had an idea that she was sly, and rebuked himself for making snap judgments.

Mrs. Doyle had heard about Fanny Rhodes's accident, and appeared greatly concerned. "Mrs. Rhodes lives next door to us, Doctor McNeill. She's like a second mother to my girls."

A moan from Bobby. "Yes, God help us."

"Bobby," her mother breathed gently, and mechanically.

"Did Aunt Fanny make a hell of a row at the hospital. Tony?" This from Marietta.

"Marietta! That is a very unfeeling way to speak of Mrs. Rhodes. How is she, Doctor McNeill? Was it a bad break? She is a widow, and her son is in Denver——"

"I couldn't say how she is, Mrs. Doyle."

Mrs. Doyle took his rebuff with good grace. "Do you like your work at Westwood?"

"I expect to like it very much, Mrs. Doyle. Of course, I've been there only three days. This is my first public appearance in Darcey, and that not planned." He glanced apologetically down at his rough tweeds.

"But—why, Marietta, you didn't——"

"Whoops!" chortled Bobby.

A quick exit was indicated, Tony decided. "Doctor Gordon is a hard taskmaster, Mrs. Doyle, as well as a fine surgeon. I'll have to leave now, I'm afraid. I go on duty at seven o'clock to-morrow morning."

"Of course." Mrs. Doyle's recovery was swift and experienced. "Do come to see us soon again, Doctor McNeill. Marietta will drive you to the hospital, won't you, dear?"

Marietta would and did. Silently, almost sombrely, Marietta sent her car splashing carelessly through the puddled streets. As she started to turn up the long driveway to the hospital, Tony said:

"Stop here, if you don't mind."

Marietta stopped, stared at him, and shrugged.

"Have it your own way. If Gordon has you bluffed . . ."

"Nonsense. It's on your account."

Marietta laughed, not very pleasantly.

"Aren't you going to thank me for the ride?"

"You know I do." Tony seized her hands. What was the matter now? What had happened? What had he done—or not done?

"Good-bye, Tony."

"I want to see you again."

"Good-bye, Tony."

His hat off, with the rain beating down, Tony watched the car hurtle down the avenue at top speed. Strange girl. Strange adventure. What was the matter with her? What was the matter with Darcey? And one more thing: was it his imagination or, just as she stepped on the starter, had she been on the point of crying?

Wryly, Tony reflected as he walked up the hospital steps that his nerves were jumpier than they had been when he started forth so virtuously in the afternoon. He passed the artificial fern in the reception-room. Look for bittersweet—that had been his idea. *Galahad*, too. Flannery. Marietta. Probably the whole damn town! But just let one of the nurses try pulling that on him . . . Damn women, anyway.

Tony, though technically off duty, stopped at the chart desk. Partly from automatic habit well established by the routine of internship. Partly because he wanted despe-

rately, following this rudderless excursion upon the open seas of his personal life, to renew his sense of safe anchorage in his professional duties.

The next morning would not be too difficult, he decided. There were a few convalescent accident cases, including one bad burn—nothing but routine dressings, however. There was a sacroiliac—bad one, apparently; chance to learn something there. Three o.b.'s on the fire, with warning signals out in one of them. Finally there was that moaning beldam, Mrs. Rhodes. The X-ray had shown that there wasn't much there to worry about.

Gordon was a stickler for records, he'd noted. They didn't keep any better charts at Boone—nothing like a harsh tongue for keeping nurses on their toes.

From somewhere along the upper corridor came a bable of voices, climaxed by an anguished wail. A door flew open, and the night nurse appeared on the stairs, angry and flustered.

"Something wrong?" Tony asked her.

She stared at him. "Oh! You're Doctor McNeill, aren't you?"

"Yes. Anything I can do?"

"No, I guess not. Mrs. Rhodes—minor accident case—wants a friend, Miss Taylor, to stay with her all night."

Tony snorted.

"Yes, Doctor. I told her she had to go home. Doctor Gordon did give her special permission to stay until eight-thirty, but . . ."

Tony looked at his watch. "It's nine-thirty now. You mean to say—"

"It's not the visitor. It's Mrs. Rhodes. She yells bloody murder, and Miss Taylor doesn't know what to do. I was afraid I'd have to call Doctor Gordon—he's at the movies."

"Yes? How about a hypo? Look, I'll attend to this."

Tony strode briskly down the hall. Without all his duties being clearly defined, he knew that his job was to save the chief when and how he could. Gordon wouldn't thank him for passing the buck, now, especially since it concerned an infraction of hospital rules. But what in hell . . . He tapped on Mrs. Rhodes's door and opened it.

The patient, in a quilted pink dressing gown, blue feathered slippers, and with her hair very much in disarray, was roaming around the small room, cradling her bandaged arm with the other one. "My God," she moaned. "My God!"

In a rocking chair over beyond the bed, directly beneath the blege of the overhead light, sat the visitor. They glanced at her briefly; pale, delicate, breastless, limp-haired, and, yes, tearful.

"Oh, Doctor McNeill," Mrs. Rhodes cried, "can't you find

Doctor Gordon? I think I'm losing my mind. I never suffered such pain in all my life."

Tony thrust his hands into his pockets and looked at the woman. "Get into bed."

"I can't sleep. I can't get comfortable. I can't . . ."

"Get into bed."

She looked at him like a fish stranded on the sand, but sat undecidedly on the edge of the high bed. The nurse took off her slippers and pushed her down upon the pillow. The visitor pulled the sheet and blanket decently across her shoulders, murmuring, "Poor Aunt Fanny."

"What are you doing here?" Tony asked the girl. She seemed both tired and frightened.

"I brought Aunt Fanny some things she needed."

"Is she your aunt?"

"Not really. I——"

"Oh, Doctor, can't you do *anything*?" Mrs. Rhodes was the patient and intended to have that fact remembered.

"Certainly I can do something. I can give you something to deaden the pain—but it won't work if you do a marathon all over the hospital."

"But I'm so nervous!"

"You're making a big fuss about nothing," Tony said pleasantly. "Now, if I get the hypo, will you promise to lie perfectly still for half an hour?"

"I don't know——"

"Get your things on, Miss Taylor. You have to go home."

The girl turned to obey, but Mrs. Rhodes clung to her hand. "I can't be alone!" she cried weeping. Tony thought that her tear ducts must respond to her will like water spigots.

"Then you'll have to have a special nurse."

"Oh, no! I don't need—I couldn't have a stranger sitting here watching me. Please let Carolyn stay?"

Tony felt like yelling. To have a grown woman act like a two-year-old brat! "Miss Taylor is tired," he said quietly. "Besides, it is against the hospital rules. You'll have Doctor Gordon down on all of us and, personally, I don't wish to be lectured to-night. Get your coat on, Miss Taylor, and wait out in the hall."

"Anything wrong with that girl, Miss Geller?" he asked when Carolyn had left.

Mrs. Rhodes interrupted to answer:

"Carolyn is a lovely girl, and a great comfort to her mother and to me."

"I don't doubt it. There!"

The hypodermic administered, Mrs. Rhodes appeared ready to succumb to its effects, or else she recognized the hopelessness of any further demonstrations. When Tony came downstairs, he saw the pale girl standing by the

reception desk. As he neared her, she started to sway, and he caught her just in time.

"Put your head down—all the way down!" And to the nurse behind him he growled: "Spirits of ammonia. This is what comes of breaking rules. . . Sit here, Miss Taylor. Get her a shot of whisky, Miss Geller—double shot."

The pale girl sat up, the colour slowly returning to her face. "Oh, no, please. I—I'm all right. I'm not used to drinking."

"Nonsense. Drink it. You want to get home, don't you? There—don't sip. Swallow it. Now." He felt her pulse. "Call a taxi, nurse. She'll do. Scared, that's all. Look, Miss Taylor. Your aunt's quite all right. She was putting on a show for your benefit, and her own."

"Oh, Doctor McNeill!"

"All right, all right. Got your things? I'll take you out. Maybe I'd better ride home with you, if you'd feel safer..."

In the taxi, Carolyn made a determined effort at composure.

But suddenly she began to tremble, and then all at once a high-pitched giggle broke into an uncontrollable flood of tears. Well, this was nice. Quite fine, in fact. Fright, plus the unaccustomed stimulant, had unleashed a classic attack of hysteria. With whisky on her breath, Tony must deliver this girl to her family.

Desperate, he seized the girl's thin shoulders, shook her roughly. She stopped crying for an instant and looked up at him like a frightened child. Then she slumped into his arms, and lay there sobbing quietly. The taxi rolled through the silent streets. Inside it, young Doctor McNeill sat holding this unknown girl against him, uncomfortably trying to fit the picture into the right professional frame. He felt a fool, impatient and touched at the same time. He looked down at the bent head—it drooped, so tired now, and the fine brown hair blew in his face. To his utter amazement, he found himself liking the feel of it, liking the helplessness of her boneless body in his strong arms.

The girl stirred, sat up, her face a pale oval in the dark. "You're very kind to me," she said softly.

"There. It's all over now," he said, relieved that it was. He pulled out a fresh handkerchief. "Blow," he commanded.

Carolyn giggled, a normal giggle this time. "Do girls always fall all over you like this, Doctor McNeill?"

"Oh, yes," said Tony nonchalantly. "Scores of them. But they're not all as nice as you."

"It must be trying," Carolyn giggled again. "But I suppose you have to sacrifice yourself to your profession."

"And it's sheer martyrdom," he said. "What do you do when you aren't playing Nightingale to spoiled old ladies?"

"Oh, I read. I read a lot, especially poetry. And I play the piano. And I teach school."

"My God, does every girl in this town work in a school-house?"

"What do you mean?" she asked quickly.

"Nothing." And kicked himself mentally. "What do you read? Oh, yes, you said poetry."

"And fairy tales," she teased. "All about Prince Charming liberating the poor princess." Her smile was like an open flower.

Oh, Lord. Here was another Darcey girl he'd have to watch his step with. Had she ambushed him, too, and staged all this? The idea was too preposterous. And didn't fit the kind of girl she seemed to be, anyway. "Tell me about Darcey," he changed the subject deftly.

"Oh, it's a dull town; the same people gossiping with each other all the time. Nothing ever happens in Darcey—except when somebody gets sick," and she looked at him—could it be?—speculatively.

"So all roads lead to Westwood!" he laughed.

"Yes. I expect the telephone operator there knows more about the town than all the rest of us combined. But everybody knows Doctor Gordon is very strict about such things, so they feel pretty safe."

"I grew up in a small town myself. As I remember, it was very pleasant and friendly, rather like an old-fashioned big family."

"Some families— Well, I hope you find Darcey like that. We're very provincial, I'm afraid. More like Winesburg. Or Zenith."

"Zenith?"

"You know—the town Main Street was in."

"Oh. I'm afraid medicine hasn't left me much time for literature—or anything else."

"You wouldn't want much else," she said sincerely, and he felt secure and competent again.

The taxi reached its destination and the girl got out quickly, unassisted. "I'm all right, Doctor McNeill. Please don't trouble. I'm awfully grateful to you. Good-night, Doctor McNeill." Again that soft smile. She went rapidly up the walk, with small brisk steps, like his mother's. Upstairs, in a lighted window, the silhouette of a woman, tensely watching . . .

The hospital was very quiet when Tony returned. A light within the front door, and John Oliver, the boy who served as night operator, dozing at his desk. The peace, the rustle of the night nurse making rounds, the occasional lights on, lights off above the closed doors of patients' rooms, all this seemed very safe and familiar to Westwood's newest staff doctor. Going down the clean, dim hall that smelled freshly

of disinfectant, Tony's professional ego geared smoothly into place again.

He undressed quickly, snapped off his light, got into bed. The night, now that the rain had stopped and the wind fallen, was still and dark. The still-strange rural noises jangled more loudly than the city traffic Tony was accustomed to at Boone. The whispering new leaves, the high whine of a car along the distant highway, three staccato yelps of a switch engine jerked into his mind among the Darcey images reeling, unreeling, heavily. Like a sinister animal, Jessie's face flashed up persistently, and in the dark Marietta's eyes glowed like a jaguar's.

Damn, he was as upset as an adolescent! Couldn't get the girl clear in, clear out, in the pinwheel of his mind. There were still only two sorts of girls to Tony, naive though he knew that idea was. She didn't fit into the gallery of hot numbers the internes saw on their nights off—when the strain of sleepless, grinding work, the cumulative handling of human bodies, stripped of all camouflage and illusion, exploded into appetites gone wild. Such jags, Tony had always—nearly always—avoided with distaste. Had the long lashing of desire, the recent anxiety over a job, the contact with Marietta, the incident with Carolyn, and especially the undercurrent of shamelessness he somehow sensed in the very warp and woof of Darcey life betrayed him now?

Grimly, Tony took himself in hand, disciplined his senses as a drill sergeant would discipline unruly men. He recalled Gordon's face to his mind, his stern voice, his uncompromising eyes. He brought up Flannery's wise, mocking smile. He set the three of them beside the operating table, made them go through the steps of a difficult hysterectomy. Mentally he covered faces, bodies, with sterile sheets, adjusted anæsthesia masks. He made a finicking job of a cast . . .

Little by little, the tumultuous whirl of Darcey's disturbing impressions surrendered to this discipline. Tony flopped over on his stomach, settled his cheek against one folded arm, wound the other firmly around his pillow. It was soft, smelled clean and warm. Marietta . . . He stirred impatiently, settled himself once more. A cool wind blew against his forehead, stirred a crisp curl. A train crooned somewhere, comfortably safe. Tony sighed . . . slept.

Chapter Three

BANKER TAYLOR, who looked like the very caricature of the rotund, provincial banker, with his snow-white hair, clipped moustache, and tight pink rosebud in the lapel of

his coat, had invited Tony to dinner the second time Tony had ever visited his bank. There was nothing odd in his doing that. As a doctor, and a doctor's son, Tony took such invitations for granted, and accepted them mechanically, without either distaste or pleasurable anticipation. Perhaps in this case there had been even a little curiosity. He would see Carolyn.

The Taylor home was on Trask Avenue, about two blocks beyond Tom Flannery's. Trask Avenue, Tony had learned, was the Mayfair of Darcey. The banker's house was appropriately big and ornate, with many porches, bay windows, and gingerbread railings. It was set back, like the rest of the houses in the neighbourhood, on a large, well-kept lawn, and was shaded by big elms and maples that somehow gave it little in the way of grace.

The Taylor family was, perhaps, not typical of a Midwest banker's household; Mrs. Taylor prided herself on lineage and blueness of blood. Her home was furnished with the heritage of all her mouldy ancestors—nowhere was to be found a trace of the varnished and chromium modernity that much poorer homes in Darcey affected.

That evening, a mulatto, in proper white coat and typically disreputable trousers, opened the door for Tony, took his hat, and left him to stand, a little uncomfortable, in the wide, dark hall.

Presently a thin voice materialized from the shadowed depths above. "Doctor McNeill?" A woman's skirts appeared in the dimness of the stairway. "I am Mrs. Taylor," the lady murmured. "We're so glad you could come."

"It was kind of you to invite me," said Tony, feeling ill at ease—a sensation unfamiliar and disliked. He wished to heaven somebody would open a window.

"Our home is the natural gathering place for the young people of Darcey," Mrs. Taylor assured him in her small voice. "Shall we find the girls?"

She opened a door at the far side of the hall and led Tony into a room that could be nothing less than a parlour. A front parlour. He stared about him unbelievably. Rosewood furniture inlaid with mother-of-pearl. Aubusson carpet. Bric-a-Brac that would have filled the Dear Queen's heart with joy.

"And these are my three daughters. Carolyn, Mirabel, and Janice. I believe you have already been presented to Carolyn."

Tony bowed towards the three female forms, vague in the dusk of the shaded room. A silly French clock, that had been ticking with a scuttering sound, buzzed angrily and struck six, rapidly and ferociously. Tony laughed. One of the girls, not Carolyn, giggled. Carolyn smiled at him.

"That's a lot of noise for such a little thing," he commented.

"Won't you sit down, Doctor? My father brought that clock from France in 1860. It keeps excellent time." Mrs. Taylor settled herself primly on the edge of a small slender chair. She then began relentlessly to make conversation. "How do you like our little city? Yes, the weather is very warm. I suppose our coloured servants seem odd to an Englishman? . . . Canadian? Coloured people are our responsibility—they are likable, if one remembers they are like children. But, like children, they need a firm hand. . . . Yes, it is a beautiful chair. An heirloom. It came to me from my father's home in Kentucky. General Lee himself once sat in it, smoking his cigar and enjoying his julep . . ."

After what seemed almost an hour, and what the busy clock showed to be fifteen minutes, Mr. Taylor appeared. He was beaming, expansive, beautifully turned out in grey, with the ever-present rosebud in his lapel. With him came the Rapps, whom Tony had met at Flannery's. George, heartily talking business—he was a hardware salesman—with Mr. Taylor. Mary Betty, his wife, chattering with the girls, drawing in Tony, her eyes speculative, alert. The atmosphere brightened considerably with their advent, and Tony was able to shift from the precarious, spindle-legged chair he had been occupying to General Lee's more comfortable memento.

"Well, Doctor!" Mr. Taylor boomed. Even on this hot evening he wore a white waistcoat, and smoothed its rounded expanse tenderly as he talked of affairs local, medical, national. "I hear things are much better in Canada than they are here with us. Too much government interference is ruining American business. Too many crackpot professors. Mistake they make is not putting the spending of that money—its distribution—into the hands of men who are used to handling money."

In the doorway, the butler admitted that dinner was ready. The company filed across the hall and into the dining-room. Tony wondered if the Taylors were always so solemn, so rigidly conventional about their entertaining. If so, what did "the young people of Darcey" make of their "natural gathering place"? He smiled to himself, imagining the boisterous crew he had met at Flannery's turned loose among Mrs. Taylor's antiques.

With efficiency, Mrs. Taylor distributed her guests around the long table. Tony at her right, and Carolyn next to him. Beyond, George Rapp, and then one of the other daughters. At the head, Mr. Taylor settled himself in the armchair of the heavy oak suite. On the other side, Mary Betty, Bill Taylor, a stolid twelve-year-old, and the other daughter. Tony faced young Bill, against a wall almost entirely taken up by a huge oak sideboard, loaded heavily with cut glass and an immense, old-fashioned silver tea

service, complete in every ornate detail, including alcohol burner, slop bowl, and huge, somewhat tarnished tray. There seemed to be a lot of furniture in the room; besides the heavy table and a dozen oak chairs, there was the sideboard, a china closet bulging with hand-painted plates and cups. Under one of the two windows there was a drop-head sewing machine scarcely disguised by a cloth embroidered with strawberries. There were more painted plates on a rail two-thirds up the dark walls. It was a handsome room. Tony supposed—completely on a level with the parlour and, like the Taylor family, one must say it was “genteel.”

In the pinkish light from the elaborate chandelier which hung clusters of purple glass grapes over the diners' heads, Tony got a better look at Carolyn's sisters. They were both abnormally fat, and had the puffed, sluggish look of hypothyroids. Janice and Mirabel. Well, lucky for them people called them Janey and Molly. The boy was underdeveloped and jumpy. Obviously, too, very much spoiled. But, at the same time, subdued by his mother.

“Does your family still live in Canada, Doctor McNeill?” Mrs. Taylor again, still toiling at the conversational mill.

“My mother and brothers do, in Montreal. My sister lives in Washington. Have you ever been in Canada?” He addressed the question to the quiet girl at his side.

“I—I've heard it is beautiful,” Carolyn said, glancing at her mother, as if for permission. It awoke a familiar tension in Tony. Years ago, his own mother had guided his every word and emotion. He concentrated now on the undefinable section of chicken on his plate. It was largely bone, and evaded his fork with agility.

“How did you happen to come to Westwood?” For a woman obviously refined to the point of bloodlessness, Mrs. Taylor was a persistent questioner. Tony looked at her, surprised and showing it.

“I mean, did you know Doctor Gordon?”

“No, indeed. He wrote to several hospitals asking them to recommend some young doctor for the place of assistant, and I was lucky enough to get the place. Perhaps because most young men want to stay in the city, near the big hospitals and clinics.”

“But you didn't?”

It was none of her business that he hadn't been able to afford a choice. “I think there isn't a better surgeon in the world than Doctor Gordon,” he answered smoothly.

“I don't know him very well, personally. He earns a good living here, I must say. But he does not seem to be much interested in our community,” said Mrs. Taylor. Almost superciliously, it seemed to Tony.

“His friendship would be worth a lot to any one. But a surgeon is probably better off, most efficient, if he can

remain impersonal. Not know his patients too well." Again he bent his attention to getting some nourishment out of the uninteresting food on his plate—the adamant chicken, the anæmic mashed potatoes, the stewed corn. Heretofore, Tony had found Darcey "company dinners" elaborate and delicious. He took one of the flat, round biscuits. They were greyish and hard.

"I don't suppose Canadians ever get beaten biscuits," Mrs. Taylor said with her acid little smile.

"We—we Scots—have oatcake and scones." He looked again at the biscuit.

The girl beside him lifted her head. "Is that the way you pronounce it? Scuns?" she smiled.

"Them, not it. I never heard of any one eating a solitary scone."

They laughed together at this mild joke. The small animation lit her face like a candle glowing through English porcelain.

"You'd like scones," Tony told her. "Hot, with lots of butter melting on them. And strawberry jam."

"It sounds very rich," Mrs. Taylor said.

Tony wished he had, right then and there, a monstrous plateful of that richness. Nelson, the butler, or houseman, or whatever he was, brought in the dessert; some pale pastry bogged in blackberry juice. Tony's thoughts fell to making out diet lists for the Taylors. For Carolyn, he would prescribe glasses of yellow milk, eggs, juicy steaks. Her wispy mother could use some of the same. Mr. Taylor—he was steadily expounding to Rapp all the business affairs of Darcey (Tony heard names, private affairs, revealing details, served up; he wondered how much of Darcey knew that he had one hundred and twenty-five dollars on deposit in the Darcey Bank)—Mr. Taylor looked very well fed. Probably ate his noon meal downtown. The boy, the girls—they all needed exercise and plates of ripe fruit.

"Have you heard from Joseph lately, Cousin Blanche?" Mary Betty asked.

"Joseph writes only to Carolyn," Mrs. Taylor answered. Her lips were compressed into a thin line, her nostrils pinched.

Tony felt Carolyn quiver. What was all this? Why was Carolyn in such an agony—was Joseph in jail? Or did he only have leprosy? And who was Joseph, anyhow—her Romeo from the wrong side of the tracks?

"Joseph is my brother," Bill blurted unexpectedly. "He's a civil engineer. In South America. I wish I was a civil engineer, too."

Mary Betty sat with a smug smile on her face. She had evidence conclusively established that Joseph did *not* write to Mrs. Taylor. (My dear, did you know . . .)

"We had hoped," Mrs. Taylor said, in her restrained voice, "that Joseph would go into the bank with his father. But children are so selfish." The words, the plaint, rang with familiar cadence in Tony's ears.

"He got a scholarship"—Carolyn's tongue tripped eagerly—"and worked his way through school. Oh, you'd like Joseph!"

"Carolyn!" Mrs. Taylor's gasped rebuke extinguished her small flame of animation.

"I'm sorry, Mother."

"Children owe more to their parents than they are sometimes willing to give, Doctor McNeill. They forget the primary fact that they owe their very lives to their mothers."

Tony almost heard himself saying, as he had said many times to his own possessive mother, all the things about personal choice and rights to decisions . . . but held his tongue, a warm undercurrent of sympathy for Carolyn springing up.

Dinner, at last, was over. Mrs. Taylor had risen. Tony sprang up to draw back her chair, and Carolyn's. He was ready to out-Chesterfield Chesterfield.

There followed half an hour on the front porch, infested with the evening insects of August. Mrs. Taylor took over the conversation with strength and purpose. The Government should do more for towns the size of Darcey. Should put industries into the town, create jobs for wage earners. It should help industries that already existed—and not too many strings tied to the money, either. Why, with half a million dollars, Mr. Taylor could make Darcey boom. He'd give some of it to Jeff Cartwright. If somebody didn't help Jeff his business was a *goner*. Oldest hardware store in this part of the state. You know that, George. Hurt you, and a lot of people if Jeff'd fail . . . And he'd been running on credit for a year. Bank couldn't keep that sort of thing up, even for a friend.

It was a relief when George Rapp suggested the movies. Tony turned hopefully to Carolyn, who said, under her mother's eye:

"Oh, no, Doctor McNeill. Thank you, I couldn't."

"Don't you like the movies?"

"They're made for the masses," Mrs. Taylor explained. "A few of us don't have the mass mind. Here in Darcey most of our gaiety is in the winter, Doctor McNeill. There are the Music League concerts, and the Christmas dances."

Tony caught a smothered giggle from Mary Betty; and Carolyn, beside him on the porch swing, stiffened. Now what?

"Mother . . ." the girl whispered, but Mrs. Taylor swept on.

"The Christmas dances are the climax of our lives here in Darcey, Doctor. We always have a dinner here in our

home before the dance on Christmas night—it's quite a town tradition. I especially want you to come to that, Doctor McNeill. It will introduce you to the nicer young people who will be at the dance. Of course, Mr. Taylor will see that you have a card."

Ah. To refuse would be rude, and impolitic for a hopeful young doctor. To accept—which of the two would embarrass Carolyn least? Which would release her from this obvious humiliation? "I would be delighted," Tony said quickly, "if Carolyn would go to the dance with me. What about it?" He smiled to the girl, and added with special urgency, "That is, if you aren't dated up already. Probably there are a dozen fellows you'd rather go with. But ditch them, won't you, for a lonely stranger?"

Mrs. Taylor rocked in her little chair. Her arms were folded across her thin breast, the toes of her slippers tapped the boards of the porch floor. "I'm sure Carolyn will be delighted to go with you, Doctor McNeill. I do not allow her to run around very much—young girls nowadays have more freedom than is good for them. But, of course, you will be there to . . . It's the most exclusive gathering in Darcey's social life, Doctor."

"Carolyn?" The girl's face had a strange, set look on it. "Is it a date? Though, of course, you know how unreliable doctors can be."

"Thank you, Doctor McNeil. I'd love to go to the Christmas dance with you," she murmured. The speech was as formal, as meaningless, as the ones she had probably been taught to say when she was six, and invited to her first party.

Tony made his departure in a little flurry of talk—thanks for the evening, explanation of his need to be back at the hospital by nine o'clock, laughing confirmation of the Christmas date. Christmas? Good heavens, that was months away. As he walked down the now familiar street towards the hospital, unaccountable tales of dragons and princesses kept recurring dizzily in his head. The sky was dark, sprinkled thickly with stars. The galaxy—what Americans called the Milky Way—swept directly over his head. These houses, set back on their wide lawns, were all alike. One block of them. Two. Laughter, to his excited ears as gurgly and malicious as that of Mary Betty, came from some of the deep porches. Whispers . . . was it the trees, or the echo of Mrs. Taylor's thin probing? Or the sick, earlier echoes of his own home—his own fear of being for ever trapped—which this possessive woman had awakened?

"Hey, Galahad! Where's the fire?" A hail from Flannery's porch. Tom and his wife were laughing as Tony turned abruptly and came up the walk. A suspiciously knowledgeable laughter, it seemed to Tony.

"Why, Tony, old man!" Tom's expression changed to one of exaggerated concern. Forcing Tony into the chaise longue, he fingered his wrist and murmured professionally: "Shock. Mix him a highball, Judith. Rising young physician meets banker's daughter. Relax, Doctor. Mamma Taylor will take care of everything, and by that I mean everything. Christmas is coming. Did she mention the Christmas ball?"

Noting Tony's startled change of expression, Flannery drew back, stared at him, and exploded with frank merriment.

"By God, the old witch did it! Make that a double highball, Judith. Don't tell me you're all signed up to take the fair Carolyn? Well, what do you know! Tell us everything. Did you have tough fried chicken and peas for dinner?"

"And boiled dishrag for dessert."

"And you sat in General Lee's own chair. Did she ask you if your grandfather fought in the Revolution?"

"In the *American* Revolution?"

Flannery exploded in laughter. "When she does, I hope you answer her in exactly that tone."

"What is it—the Darcey grapevine again?"

"Just the rites, son. The classic rites of entry into the holy of holies. Next thing you know you'll be squiring the lady to church every Sunday."

"Church!"

"Don't you believe in God?" asked Flannery in a thin solemn voice, like Mrs. Taylor's. "God made the Taylors out of what He had left over when He finished the angels. And they begat three virgins—the only ones in Darcey, as a matter of fact."

"Carolyn is a nice girl," said Tony defensively.

"Oh, oh!" Flannery roared. "Galahad to the rescue! Judy, bring him a sandwich. The lad is beginning to hear voices and dream dreams. Are you going to take her in and give her a saucer of warm milk, Tony?"

"I do feel sorry for her. Does her mother bully her all the time?"

"Her mother bullies the whole family. In a refined way, of course. Her family's so old that *rigor mortis* is well established. And you know how a corpse can clutch. The older boy tried to hang himself when he was eighteen. He ran around with a girl who's as highly sexed as a Persian kitten. He wanted to marry her, but she wasn't having any. Wanted someone who could take her out of this town. When the Taylors found out there was love out of wedlock in their family, the old fool disinherited the boy. Disinherited, like in the old thrillers. Best thing they ever did for him, too. Put himself through school and is now the only human Taylor out of captivity. Engineer somewhere in South America, I believe."

Tony took a swallow of his highball. "What happened to the girl? Was she pregnant?"

"Oh, no. She's around still, raising merry hell and hoping to God somebody will get her out of Darcey."

"You're gossiping like an old woman. Tom," Judith yawned, and rose. "I believe I'll go to bed. Don't go, Tony. Tom's having a workout."

There was a long silence. "I . . . I have a horror of sex looseness, Tom. Do all the girls in Darcey sleep around?"

"Oh, they pair off. They belong to what is known as the Younger Married Set, not all young and not all married. It starts in high school, usually. The gentle Carolyn is about the only one who doesn't play."

"It all looks so respectable. Trask Avenue, the houses, the cars, the lawns. Of course in Cypress Flats . . . There's a slum and whore district everywhere, I fancy. But——"

"They observe the taboos. Mrs. Taylor and the other ladies of the music and welfare leagues and the censorship boards see to that. Three Mile Lane on a dark night is banked with cars, but any young lady can buy herself an abortion for ten dollars, and put off the bother of house-keeping and children and worry along on a budget until her man makes enough to afford a car and a maid. They figure there's not much sense in giving up their pretty clothes and comfortable homes, and the men think about the same. And on the other streets, they have to stay home and help the parents."

"What about romance—building something up together? I always thought——"

"Building what? It's all a matter of how soon you get harnessed in, buying more lamps and more cars and more gadgets and going to the movies for your cheap dreams."

"Taboo, Tony, means untouchable. Every tribe has them. They're protective mechanisms for whoever is getting the best out of any setup. In Darcey, we have many of them, and they're complex, but they all boil down to one thing—preserving the *status quo*. It's fear, Tony. Trask Avenue is afraid of Cypress Flats, afraid of Clifford Street where the mill workers live, afraid of books, of strangers, afraid of our Westwood even. More than anything, it's afraid of itself. Ever see a broken pipe, Tony, held together by its own accumulation of rust? The smallest tap on any part of it will crack the whole thing wide open. All Darcey knows Cypress Flats is a sewer hole, a breeding place for epidemics and crime. Mention that to any of the Mrs. Taylors, and you're being vulgar. Mention it publicly and you're boycotted—don't forget the rents and the rake-offs being gathered in by the politicians, some of our best people. Tony . . . Try to do anything about it, and you're ostracized for stirring up the mob. They can wreck any man pretty quickly, especially a doctor, whose capital

is public opinion—among the people who can afford to pay his fees. It's not only Cypress Flats, either. That's just a symptom of the general pathology of the town—snobbery and ignorance pyramided on dreariness, misery, and despair."

"A doctor . . . don't you think we have enough on our hands with medical problems? Such things aren't really our responsibility?"

"Oh, sure," Wearily, Flannery refilled the highballs, lit cigarettes. "Sure, sure. Clean our own back yard. Work as hard as hell, get bleary-eyed at it, read the medical journals only, keep our minds on technical matters. That's the gospel of Westwood, medical paradise within four walls. Typhoid epidemic—call in Public Health. Smallpox—get the hell out of here to a public hospital. Syphilis, tuberculosis—we'll treat whoever comes for treatment, and never mind the fact that carriers too ignorant or too poor for Westwood go around multiplying diseases as deadly as leprosy any day. We'll patch up the women who have been ripped to hell by Mattie Jordan, and keep our mouths shut. The botch jobs and gangrenes and advanced carcinomas that the town plumbers milked—we'll go through the motions there, too, all very perfect technically. Keep our skirts clear of the Darcey dirt, and be very careful not to do or say anything that would get the pack on our necks."

"You're bitter, Tom. Westwood does a wonderful job, for what it is. I don't know what more one could ask of Gordon."

"Gordon's an A-1 surgeon and pours his whole life into that. Wise enough to limit his crusading to within his own domain. But he doesn't kid himself either, Tony. He knows he's baling out the ocean with a spoon."

"If you're so unhappy here, why don't you leave Darcey, then?"

"And go where? It's the same story in every town, and in the cities too, only there one doesn't see it in so much detail. Maybe it's knowing the names and the occupations and seeing the children of the casualties that burn me up. Maybe your Galahad face and noble ideas got me stirred up again. Heigh-ho! Drink up, Tony! Here's to crime, cash, and cohabitation."

A decrepit Ford clattered up to the hospital door just as Tony turned in the walk. He saw a man, evidently very panicky, tumble out and rush inside. He was clamouring, in thick Italian accents, for Doctor Gordon when Tony came in.

"What is it?" Tony asked the sleepy boy at the desk. "Is Doctor Gordon asleep? Don't wake him, I'll look after this . . . Your wife? In the car?" Tony grabbed his ste-

thoscope as he passed his room and ran out after the blubbering man.

A woman was lying doubled up on the back seat of the car. She was dressed only in a thin cotton night-gown. A quilt that had been thrown over her had dropped to the floor. Tony's fingers found almost no pulse; his stethoscope, a very rapid and thready beat. With the husband's help, he wrapped her in the quilt, took her in his arms—she couldn't have weighed much over a hundred pounds—and carried her inside. John Oliver had a stretcher at the door, had called a nurse. Tony didn't wait for the making out of a form. They put the woman to bed quickly. Her thin hair streamed back on the pillow and her blue eyes rolled and darted around the room, tortured in frightful anxiety. It took two nurses to hold her—she was writhing and tossing so—while Tony tried to secure some coherent history from her husband. Her temperature was way up, her cheeks hectically scarlet. Perspiration poured off her face like water. They tried to give her an alcohol sponge and keep icebags on her head, to bring the fever down. Tony sent for an oxygen tank and stimulants. He started swabbing her arm for the needle, but it was no use. He felt her pulse become more and more rapid, and shallow, and her anxious unrest increased to the point of fury. Suddenly her eyes rolled completely back, and she stopped breathing. A last convulsion—she was dead. Septicæmia. Tony's numb mind ticketed this horror.

The husband, wild with rage and grief, then blurted out the whole story. He had a patch of land, a small truck garden where he raised vegetables which he had peddled on the streets of Darcey. His wife had been able to help him; they made out pretty well. The children began to come, one right after the other, and the work and worry wore her down. "She think too much, Doctor. All the time she get herself crazy figuring."

The woman had become pregnant again—two months, maybe three. Several days ago her mother had given her ten dollars for clothes for the new baby. An unexpected gift. The woman had gone to Mattie Jordan with the money. Hadn't said anything to her husband for a few days—two—but then she got very sick and scared and told him that she had had an abortion. That was three days ago. "Jeez, Doctor, I was so mad I see fire. I no drink, no cheat peoples, work hard, try everything. She no theenk one strong man take care his own family? Two, three, many children, nice. Work on place. Set out onions. Boe. Times maybe get better, I dunno, Doctor. My wife, she near crazy figuring the babies get hungry. They not hungry yet, but who knows? Not enough maybe food for another, maybe not good food; I crazy too. Maybe it was my fault. Biggest boy five, little girl three, baby year and a half. But

better she have this one, Doctor. Not get killed. I like to kill that black woman."

Tony sat drawing figure eights on the back of the Richetti history sheet. And erasing them. A slow, cold anger rose in him as he listened; it roared in his ears. Damn it, God damn it. She'd be autopsied. He called John Oliver brusquely.

"Can you take this story down? Do you know how to do an affidavit form? You do? Good for you! Well, write it longhand. Get Miss Ward and one of the other nurses to witness it."

"Richetti, I'm going to try to fix that Jordan woman. You answer all the questions this man asks you—tell him what you just told me—and be ready to serve as a witness in court as soon as this thing gets lined up. I'm going to send that old murderess to jail where she belongs if its the last thing I do."

Keeping one ear to John Oliver's progress with the statement, Tony heard himself giving orders, making the routine preparations for an autopsy, reporting the death, as if in a delirium. He realized afterwards that this was the sort of hypnotic action people went through in earthquakes and wars. Everybody did as he said, their questions and wonderings stopped by medical discipline and perhaps some strangeness in the way he behaved. His habitual caution, his timidity in a still-new place, all his training and set ideas about how a doctor should steer clear of a social scandal, even the knowledge that this was Gordon's hospital, and he only an assistant, were wiped out by his rage. This angry man was a Doctor McNeill he himself had not known existed.

Chapter Four

THE WAITING customers at the Premier Barber-shop watched the tall, young man get out of the chair, put on his tie, coat, and hat, pay the man who had served him.

"Thanks, Doc. Hurry back!" the barber called after his cheerful good-day. The second the door swung to, comment broke out.

"Who's that, Curly?"

"New doc over at Westwood."

"Been here long?"

"Couple months, I guess. Comes in every ten days for a trim. He's fussy about his hair line."

"I guess they're pretty busy at Westwood, if they're taking on new men like that. He say how he liked it here?"

"I guess he likes it all right. I hear he's kind of popular with the dames."

"Women always like doctors."

"Wonder why." The men all snickered.

"I've seen him out at the country club."

"Who?"

"The new doc. Isn't his name McNeill?"

"Yeah. Play golf?"

"Yeah. A good game of bridge, too."

"Dja ask him about that girl was in the accident, Curly? The Mason girl?"

"I asked him," Curly admitted. "He just said she was doing fine."

"That all he said?"

"Yeah. He ain't much of a talker. Pleasant, but he don't say much."

"Maybe he's scared of Gordon."

"Gordon'd scare anybody."

"He's a damn good doctor, though. Nobody can take that away from him."

"I guess there's plenty of these Darcey plumbers would like to. I notice he ain't so popular with the town docs."

"Lucky for us he sticks around. Anybody gets really sick, they go to him. You don't see Westwood bellyaching about hard times. I'll say not—they hire another doctor!"

"Gordon must be a friend of yours," one of the men taunted.

"I'd be mighty proud to say it if he was. You fellows think he's cranky and close-mouthed. Well, let me tell you, if the time ever comes you want a secret kept, you'll be plenty glad he's that kind. He don't talk, and he don't listen to talk."

"You been there, Wes?"

"Damned right, I been there. Everybody's got things he don't want printed in the *Darcey Times*."

As he walked down the street, Tony ran into young Garms, who was one of the few Darcey doctors whom Westwood really respected. Garms was a general practitioner in the poorer part of town. He did a great deal of obstetric work, pediatrics, and the general run of chronic ailments that went through Westwood's Saturday clinic.

This clinic was Flannery's job, with Tony assisting. Farmers who came in with their produce Saturday mornings had the habit of drifting into the hospital with their complaints, bringing their sick wives and relatives too. They crowded in so much on that one day, and had so little money, that Gordon had decided to handle that part of Westwood's practice on a clinic basis. It was already too much for Flannery when Tony came. Between them, they managed, organizing their work so the nurses took histories and did as much of the routine as possible, saving the doctor's time for examination and diagnosis.

It had been Tony's idea to start, in addition to this, a

regular prenatal clinic, and Gordon endorsed it enthusiastically. Tony began taking routine Wassermanns on the women, and what he found developed another problem. The cases had to be coaxed and bullied to get them under regular treatment. Sometimes Tony threw a scare into them, desperately anxious as he was to get them into decent condition and cut down the number of stillbirths, and blind and crippled babies. At that, the women were easier to persuade than the men. Once they understood what venereal infection might mean to the child, they shook off some of their resigned apathy and came in pretty regularly. Gordon willingly cut the clinic rates to facilitate this. They sent the Wassermanns to the nearest state public-health laboratory, reported their findings faithfully. Tony did this work, and they were offered help if they needed it.

Most of the Darcey doctors resented the Saturday clinic bitterly. From their viewpoint, Westwood was engaging in unfair competition, giving medicine at prices cheaper than any man could afford to give or prescribe it in his private office. All those farmers, and miners, and factory workers who took advantage of the clinic might have been their private patients—at least some of them. They didn't have much, but, as old Doc Turner said, when a man's wife is sick he gets the money somehow. These people spent money easily enough on radios and other luxuries. Why shouldn't they pay decent rates to the doctors?

Young Garms was one of the few exceptions to the silent boycott directed by the Darcey doctors against Westwood. He offered to come in and help Saturday mornings, if he could shift his poorer patients over to the clinics. "Working together with other men you learn more," he said, "and it gives the patients extra protection." What his patients paid, Gordon turned over to Garms. Difficult cases he brought to Westwood for consultation—to Tony, usually, since they were most often obstetrical cases.

As he walked along the street with Tony this day, he told him of a case he had lost the week before.

"It made me boiling mad," he said, "and I'm still sick about it. The woman had had one child, a boy who's sixteen now. She was past forty. Last summer she came around and wanted me to do an abortion. Mainly because she was afraid, or embarrassed, or just didn't want the bother probably. I talked to her like a grandfather, and I thought I persuaded her that, at three months, a miss is more dangerous than a birth. And just as hard."

"You wouldn't—"

"No, Tony, I wouldn't. But there wasn't a thing except influence to keep her from going to Mattie Jordan."

"M-m-m," said Tony.

"Yes. Well, I thought I had got away with it. But she didn't come back. I ran into her husband one day and he

told me she was going to another doctor. Well, her term came. My wife heard she was down—they use that expression around here. I couldn't help being nervous. Her age and all. Then my wife told me they'd fetched Mattie Jordan."

"Ah! And——"

"Jordan's an old-fashioned midwife, Tony. I don't know how much you've heard about her. Sits there smoking a corncob pipe and cackling. Asepsis isn't even a word to her."

"Well, to make a long story short, I got a call at three in the morning. I went, of course. When I got there, the mother was in terrible pain."

"And the midwife?"

"She'd cleared out. The husband said she's seen there was trouble, told 'em to call a doctor, and cleared out."

"Any anæsthetic?"

"Lord, no."

"Garms, would that husband give you an affidavit of what happened?"

"I think so. Are you laying for Mattie Jordan?"

"I am."

"She's licensed, you know."

"Yes, Gordon told me. You have to have ample proof and at least one direct witness. I have some evidence already, and this case of yours builds it right up. There'll be more if we watch for them."

"Go to it, son. I'm with you."

On his way back to Westwood, Tony saw many people he knew. He was surprised, on these infrequent trips to the town, how at home he felt in it now. He was beginning to distinguish people, lives, from the blur of flat, brassy accents that had first struck his ear. He was beginning to separate faces, homes, from histories of babies and broken bones. He was beginning to find a sense of place in the community, feel himself a living human being in useful contact with other human beings. He had an odd feeling of responsibility for them all. The feeling, he thought shyly, that his father must have had. You could never be a specialist in a big city and get that satisfaction out of your work.

Home now was Westwood. From the first day, the routine of the crowded hospital had absorbed most of his energy. Gordon revealed himself as a surgeon any man would be proud to work with. His hands, alone, it seemed, sometimes knew more than Tony's whole mind. At times, they made swift decisions that made Tony gasp. But only at first. Soon he realized that here was a man who worked at a truly phenomenal level of intense, poised concentration in which eye and mind became a single swift and resourceful instrument. At any failure of alertness and efficiency whether of Tony or a nurse, he blazed—briefly but blind-

ingly—like a crossed trolley wire. This was rare, however. Usually he conducted a fairly long and difficult operation in complete silence; and that silence, Tony knew, was as much praise as he was likely to get. And to praise him, Gordon, would have seemed sheer impertinence to Tony. He would, quite simply, have trusted him with his own body.

On the morning after the Richetti episode, he had been afraid of Gordon. That whole business of taking the affidavit, committing himself more or less to using it, had been done, he realized, automatically in his rage. High-handed, Gordon might think it. When Tony told him about it, floundering to explain the whys, Gordon had said a strange thing.

"A man can duck trouble just so long. Then he gets a crick in the neck, and that's trouble too."

"Sir?"

"Nothing. Go to it, son. And if you nail the bitch, I'll give you a bonus and dance at your wedding."

"You don't think it may make trouble for you, sir?"

"What, your wedding? You bet it will!"

Tony grinned. "I mean the Jordan business."

"The day hasn't come yet when any kind of racketeer can interfere with Westwood. Let them try it, that's all. Just let them dare."

So Tony was happy at Westwood. Walking warily, he had established himself firmly in the routine of the hospital, and had secured the liking of each member of the staff, from Flannery to John Oliver and Asy. He was honestly and unselfishly glad that his usefulness at Westwood was recognized. The proof of this came when Gordon decided that it was safe now for Flannery to take a long-postponed vacation, which meant that he and Tony would have to divide the work on hand. Further evidence was forthcoming when, on Tom's return, Tony was permitted to remain in charge of all the obstetrical work. This pleased him tremendously, not only a proof of confidence, but because he was definitely interested in the field. He had the feeling that this particular branch of medical activity comes closer to being a surgeon's job than most doctors will admit. And he had some pet theories that he thought Gordon would, in time, let him work out.

Yes, he was happy at Westwood. He liked everything, about the hospital. He liked its discipline and order, its primary concentration on a good job. Its *morale*, which went all the way from Gordon to the newest student nurse. The nurses had all been a big help to him, during those first confused and busy days. They were kind about telling him what came next, and warning him of the things Gordon might get shirty over. He had, of course, been plunged at once neck-deep into the multiplicity of detail that fills the

life of any house physician. He expected this. He didn't mind at all reading charts, one after the other, and could take a real interest in temperatures, pulses. He could take his list of directions, made up by Gordon and Flannery, with a real interest in the welfare and progress of patients who, personally, were nothing to him. His reward came at such times as when, one night, he had helped Gordon lift the skull from the brain of a boy who had been kicked by a horse. Humdrum surgery, indeed! Ya-a-a-h, Breaker!

He wrote Breaker: "You'd never get the variety of cases through the hands of one surgeon—and his assistant—in a bigger hospital. For me, wanting to learn and do as much surgery as I possibly can, this is the place to be. Surgeons like Gordon don't come more than one to a package. And besides, the hospital serves a wide field. One doesn't waste much time here in puttering around. Every pair of hands that knows its business can be useful down to the bone."

When he started going through the field histories, he saw what an opportunity they held to do a comparative study of cases. Whole families came to Westwood for treatment of one kind and another. Disease tendencies in certain blood strains could be traced by the reactions of as many as a hundred human guinea pigs—all related, all living, all available for study. It was thrilling to think of what clinical research might be accomplished in such a laboratory. Keeping careful records, over a period of years, handing them down to the men who came afterward, Heaven knew what problems might not be solved. Thus, Tony, enthusiastically, to Gordon.

Gordon smiled. "That's why I bought Westwood," he said.

"Did you, sir? The idea hadn't occurred to me, before I came here. I can see the value of it now."

"You told me once that your father and grandfather kept records of birth data about the families who were their patients."

"Yes, sir, they did. I showed them to Doctor Celoud. It was interesting to see how measurements and eccentricities would be passed along from one generation to another. I expect Dad had in mind something along these lines when he wanted to build his hospital. I dare say I was too green to see the point."

"Nobody begins knowing everything. When I left my training, I was fully persuaded I would be only a specialist in abdominal surgery. I could see nothing else."

"You'd have been very fine, sir. Why didn't you?"

"Four years of war—and a kind of restlessness."

"You, sir?" Tony smiled.

"Yes. You see, I'd have those boys come through my hands. I had no chance to know what their past histories

had been. And I never knew what became of any of them. It all seemed pretty futile and mechanical."

"Like a big city clinic, only worse, I guess."

"Yes. Then, in service, I had done everything. Brain work, toe amputations, everything but psycho-analysis. And the same bug bit me as bit a lot of soldiers. I couldn't settle down to the routine of peace-time days, all alike, one after the other. The prospect of doing one gastroenterostomy after the other, with only recovery or death to vary the story . . . well, here I am. G.P."

"The old family doctor, brought up to date."

"Yes. What do you think of it?"

"Me? I'd ask nothing better!"

One night, about two weeks after the Richetti business, Gordon came home from the movies to find Tony immersed to his neck in a steaming hot bath, reeking of disinfectant. The chief laughed and closed his fingers over his nose.

"Are you terrorized by the B.O. ads, Tony?"

Tony grinned and pointed to the metal clothes-hamper. "Will you tell Asy to put those things through the sterilizer?"

"What is this—cholera?" Gordon took off his glasses to polish them clear of the steam.

"No. But it is puerperal fever."

That got him. Gordon swung around, startled. "Tony—"

"I left it outside. But I'm taking no chances."

"How—where—"

"Herbert has a case."

"Good God! If he has a case, Garms must have an epidemic. But, how did you—"

"He wanted to send it here. I had a hunch or something, and investigated."

"Go on." Gordon looked worried.

"Herbert came in this evening and said he had this case. He didn't say what it was. Wanted to see you. Tried to cover up that it was somebody Mattie Jordan had delivered."

"Ah."

"Yes. You should have seen me going easy—a cat on tiles could have learned from me. Well, I asked him this and that. Casual-like. He was very professional with me. He and his diagnosis—he can make a wrong one nine times out of ten. It's uncanny. Ethics stuck out all over him like quills. He said it was pneumonia—high fever, intense pain. Possibly intestinal 'flu."

"Possibly," Gordon's voice was harsh and dry. He was sealing the hamper, marking it for sterilization. Then he put it out in the hall. He came back and, leaning against the wall, gave Tony full attention.

"I put on the Hawkshaw cap and went to have a look. Puerperal beyond a doubt. Blue spots plain as your nose. Lassitude. She hasn't much chance. I told Herbert what it was, suggested sulphanilamide, and advised him not to sign any death certificate. That will force an investigation, won't it?"

"Yes. And?"

"Herbert tried to argue about it. He would with me, anyway. I may have talked pretty roughly to him."

"Who was the patient?"

"People by the name of Ross. I don't know them. The house was clean, but poor of course. I questioned the husband, and the woman's mother. He wouldn't say much, but the old lady was a fighter. Mad because they'd had a midwife. Said she could have borne the baby herself better than a damn hag coughing all over the place."

Tony stopped and let the full dramatic value of this climax grow on Gordon. The reaction came like an explosion:

"Will she testify? The grandmother?"

"I made sure of it."

"Tony, we're going to put that woman in jail!"

"For having a sore throat?"

"Well, an injunction, then——"

"I have a few leads I've picked up from clinic patients. Garms gave me some, too. I'd like to borrow Tom's car and go out and see what I can see. We ought to get together enough to put her away for a good long time."

"If we move fast. And we'll have to move however we can to check the puerperal if there is more of it. Notify Public health. We can't have it hit Westwood. Christ, you'd think it was still the Middle Ages, with that turning up."

"I'll go scouting to-morrow. Maybe I can dig up a direct witness."

"Well," said Gordon doubtfully. "Though people who resort to illegal abortion won't be so anxious to have it known, and as for the others—I don't know. Go ahead and try, anyway. It will stir the animals, but it may be worth while."

"Listen, Tony," said Tom when he went to get the car, "come over to my place when you get through and have some dinner. There's dance at the country club to-night—we'll need it, to get the stink out of our respective nostrils."

"Dinner? Dance?"

"Don't look so dazed, Galahad. Relax. Sherlocking Mattie as an extracurricular activity is all very worthy, but you don't have to put twentyfour hours a day in on it. Come around about six. You ought to be through by then—and you'll want a drink."

Tony first drove straight out to the midwife's place. Tom

had made him a sketch of the streets and roads where he wanted to go, had illustrated it with comments: T. B. Valley, Syphilis Grove, Typhoid Terrace, Polio Promenade. . . . Tony wasn't so very amused.

Mattie Jordan lived in a pretty cottage about two miles out. It was white, covered with honeysuckle and rambler roses. Tony had been told she owned the place. It made his skin crawl to see it, knowing how it had been bought. A mulatto girl opened the door. Mattie wasn't in, she didn't know when she would be in, didn't know where she was, and suspiciously:

"You one of those Westwood doctors, ain't you?"

"Yes."

"I don't know as you've any business around here." The girl had the boldness to be impudent and slammed the door in his face.

He got pretty much the same kind of treatment at a number of the houses where he called. One woman abused him elaborately, told him to get the hell out and not go nosing into poor folks' affairs. "Mattie works for ten dollars. I'd like to see the day when you high and mighty docs do the same. What's eatin' you? Is she too cheap for you? She's cuttin' into your business, that's all. Sure, we'd like to have our babies all nice and soft with a lot of starched-up docs and nurses holdin' our hands and pattin' us on the head. Sure, and we'd like to have Packards, too, and steak for supper every night. . . ."

Wherever there had been a death, the people refused to see him at all. But some of the women who had been delivered by Mattie did ask him in politely, answered a few of his questions, and then peppered him with theirs. They were boiling with curiosity. Others answered dully, as if he were a census man or something. It was the same story always, anyhow. "Ten dollars, ten dollars," the words hammered in his head. And the public record. Child delivered by Mattie, mother dead of peritonitis a week or ten days later. Child delivered by Mattie, birth injury, paralyzed arm. Child delivered by Mattie, mother dead of "pneumonia" before she got out of bed. And how many of the "ruptured appendices" were Mattie's doing?

That night at the country club Tony, despite the jazz, liquor and bouncing hilarity in which the Darcey sophisticates seemed to specialize, couldn't get those women and their refrain, "Ten dollars, ten dollars," out of his head. Even Judith's excellent dinner had tasted flat to him. He couldn't shake himself out of this sorry sense of frustration, helplessness, God knows what.

He found Flannery at the far end of the porch beside a tall highball.

"What, Tony! Do you mean to tell me you can't take it?"

"I just wanted a little air."

"Yes, a little air would help," agreed Flannery as he contemplated the indeterminate, treeless pastures which comprised Darcey's rural landscape. "God knows," he repeated, "a little air would help."

Tony stared. Half an hour before, Tom had been singing and dancing with every appearance of enthusiasm, making him wonder if years of medicine would put his heart on ice too.

"The point is," continued Flannery, "there isn't any air, and can't be. Darcey, as you are now discovering, is a good place to accumulate clinical data. But scarcely a health resort, for the body or the mind. Or the soul," he added, "which latter quantum, I trust, is not immortal."

Again Tony was struck by the expression of pain which he had noted when he first met Flannery. But what was this all about? Was Tom drunk? Sick?

"Anything the matter, old man?" he asked. "Don't want me to take you home, do you? I'll speak to Judith if you like."

Flannery laughed, drained his glass and rose. "Thanks, Tony. If you mean am I tight, the answer is, not particularly. Not any more so than I find necessary, or at least pleasant, as a prophylactic measure against a too-active appreciation of the limitations of Darcey. Being in Darcey, I do as the Darceyans do. I advise you to make a similar adaptation—if you can take it."

"What are you getting at, Tom?"

"Oh, life and death and women and taxes."

"What about Darcey? What's the matter with it?"

Flannery regarded him mildly. "Unfortunately, Tony, Darcey never brings that question to Westwood stated in precisely those terms. It brings the physical members of Darcey's body politic, but never the patient himself—the patient being the community. It brings the symptoms of the illness, but never the actual disease. Even if it did, I am afraid we docs couldn't do much."

"You didn't answer my question."

"No, I didn't. What's the matter with Darcey? I could give you a medical diagnosis. I know the health statistics for this county and, as you may have guessed, they're not so hot, especially since the depression decided to stay with us. But that's not the half of it. What's the matter with Darcey? What's the matter with America? I'll tell you, Tony. America has hit dead centre and stopped like a rusty clock. Darcey is mid-continent. If I were a sociologist—which God forbid—I'd clear my throat at this point, wipe my glasses, and say pompously, 'As Darcey goes, so goes the nation.' The funny thing is, it may be true. Me, I'm just a small-town doc, but I notice a few things. Darcey, as a community, exhibits one symptom

which, if it developed in an individual case, would send us chasing after blood donors and oxygen tents. You'll notice it when you've been here a little longer."

Sadly, Flannery gazed into his emptied glass and then started in the direction of the music.

"Wait a moment! You're not going to leave that one hanging in the air, are you?"

"Huh! Oh, well, if you insist. But don't give it a thought, Tony. Just say I'm drunk. The trouble with Darcey is that it hasn't made up its mind whether to live or die. Am I wrong, Tony, or is that a tough one in any man's hospital?"

"I think you're nuts."

"Better men than you have said that, Tony, including our distinguished chief," replied Flannery mildly. "However, Gordon indulges these alcoholic hunches of mine. A man has to have a few pleasures in this damned town, doesn't he? And it might be worse. Take Cypress Flats, for example. Now there's a community that knows its mind."

"What do you mean, 'mind?' A community hasn't any mind!"

Flannery stared at him. "Out of the mouths of babes. Galahad, you're likely to learn something if you're not careful. That's just the trouble, of course. Cypress Flats has no mind. What's happening there is below, or perhaps one should say outside, the periphery of consciousness—like the curious process that goes on in a bacterial culture. You look at it and, if you really stop to think of it, you don't know exactly what or why; the only thing you're sure of is that you can't direct or control it—much." Flannery paused and puffed at his cigarette.

"You mean Cypress Flats?"

"That's right. You can always empty the test tube, of course, and start over again. I believe one of those pre-Hitler German scholars had some such notion—Spengler, wasn't it?"

"But, hell, this is America. If Cypress Flats—any community—is as bad as that . . . Come on home. I think you really are drunk."

"No, Tony." Flannery's voice was weary. "I'm not drunk. Neither are the statistics. The poor old doc that put them together died a couple of years ago. Good thing, too. He couldn't have stood what has happened since. But he had the picture before he died—maybe that was what killed him. Surrealist stuff—you know, one of those abstract designs that drive you nuts when you see them in a gallery. The perfect vicious circle. Poverty begets sickness. Sickness begets poverty. Such goings on! Old Saunders—as fine a G. P. as ever hung out a shingle—was a kind of Hippocratic cop in that community, all the time

trying to break it up; yelling to the state health authorities, coming in to cry on Gordon's neck. Maybe he got a little touched towards the end; lived for ten years on his patients' cabbages and potatoes. He practically carried Cypress Flats on his own shoulders, and when he died—phtt!" Flannery made an eloquent gesture.

"But surely!" Tony hesitated. "Saunders wasn't the only doctor on tap for that community, was he?"

"No. There was a young chap from the East that tried to take over. I think Gordon had something to do with selling him the idea. He lasted just six months." Flannery chanted in his Irish tenor: "Bei mir ist weh! The patient cannot pay! And that's Garm's theme song, too. What holds him up is a certain amount of compensation work. . . . Come on, Tony, let's shape it up a little. Do us both good."

"But, Tom! God in heaven, I never heard of anything like that. Darcey—Darcey—isn't so bad, is it?"

Flannery stopped short and his expression was one of concentrated bitterness. "No. Not so bad. As I told you, Darcey hasn't made up its mind. If you or I or any other doctor attempted honestly to—if we tried to *live* with the steady consciousness of how damned little we know and how little we can do compared to the horrible need that slaps us in the face every day of our lives—hell, if I tried that, I'd vomit every morning before breakfast like a pregnant woman. Come on, Galahad!"

Abruptly he strode through the porch door. A moment later, Tony saw him laughing and jesting as he directed the Darcey version of the Big Apple on the dance floor.

Chapter Five

"GINNY," to Fanny Rhodes, across a box of quilt pieces "that young Doctor McNeill is the nicest young man Darcey ever saw."

"Where did you meet him, Fanny?"

"Oh, he helped take care of me in the hospital. And he has come to a couple of Rotary dinners. He sang at one, and he has the loveliest voice. Everybody says how nice he is. Mrs. Taylor—and you know how cranky she is about such things—they had him out to dinner one night—"

"She's trying to get a beau for one of the girls."

"Well, maybe. He'd make a good one!" Mrs. Leigh giggled like a girl of sixteen, and her old cheeks were pink. "Mrs. Taylor said he had the loveliest manners of any man who had ever been in her house."

"Well, that covers a lot of ground, when you consider that practically everybody in Darcey goes there, one way or another."

"I know it. But every one says he is nice, Ginny. Wouldn't it be lovely if he were to fall in love with one of our town girls?"

"Well, that would depend on the girl."

"Of course. Why, I didn't know Marietta was home!"

Quilt blocks went flying to the carpet, two pairs of eager eyes—no longer young—peered out through Mrs. Leigh's starched lace curtains to watch a shiny little car swish up a driveway across the street, to see a girl in a black and red plaid coat, a little red hat, and high-heeled red shoes skip up the porch steps and into the house. Both of the women could hear the door slam, five hundred feet away, and with the window closed.

They smiled at each other, and Fanny Rhodes bent to pick up the gay bits of cotton print. "If I were a man," Ginny sighed, "that would be the sort of girl I'd marry."

"You mean, that would be the sort you'd *want* to marry," Fanny said pointedly. "But—I don't know, Ginny. I was glad Harvey didn't."

"Your precious Harvey never had a chance!"

"My son is as good as any man on earth. If he had wanted Marietta——"

"Then it's a good thing he didn't want her——"

"I still say that a spoiled girl makes a poor wife. You won't deny that Marietta is spoiled?"

"Of course, she's spoiled. Her daddy gives her everything she asks for, and her mother thinks she is the most perfect thing on earth. But then we all spoil her. Marietta can have anything on this end of Trask Avenue for the asking."

"Or the taking. However"—Fanny measured and bit off a length of thread—"I still say I feel sorry for the man she marries. I've said that ever since she was four years old and stripped the blooms off of every geranium in this block because, her mother said, she loved flowers so much."

Mrs. Leigh laughed. "I remember that. And Mrs. Taylor said she should be spanked, and Leila didn't speak to her for three years."

"Mrs. Taylor never liked Marietta. Don't you remember—she had scarlet fever and the Doyles hired the nurse who was to take care of Mrs. Taylor when Carolyn was born?"

"That wasn't Marietta's fault."

"No, but you'd have thought it was. Do you remember the party Mrs. Taylor gave for Carolyn and didn't invite Marietta, and she kept all the little boys from going, and they stole the ice cream?"

"Goodness, she's done so much! I always say, she's kept

me young. I want to live to see what Marietta will do next."

At this moment, Tony strode into sight, vaulted the Doyles' low iron fence, rang the Doyles' doorbell, paused, and then rang again impatiently.

"Oh! Oh, come quick, Fanny. You wanted to know what Marietta will do next. Look! Look!"

"I can't see very well. Is it——"

"It certainly is. Straight from the hospital. What's more, I'm surprised it hasn't happened sooner."

Mrs. Leigh sighed. "Poor Mrs. Taylor!"

After their first meeting, it was nearly three months before Tony saw Marietta again. He had first phoned, then written to her and had received no answer. Later he could tell himself it was mere coincidence that had brought them together again.

It had been a heavy day at Westwood: a Caesarian, and a difficult gall-bladder operation—both scheduled for the same morning. Excellent as Tony's training had been, the ordeal had surpassed anything he could have imagined.

So that it was physical therapy rather than pleasure that brought Tony, an indifferent golfer, to the country club that afternoon. And it was the clumsiness of his still unrelaxed muscles that sent his first drive wide of the fairway into a brier-infested gully. Finally, it was pure coincidence this time, Tony told himself, when, plunging through the tangle on the direct line of his ball's flight, he came abruptly upon another searching figure. Gold hair, smart blue blazer, tweed skirt swinging from full competent hips—yes, it was she.

Marietta stared at him coolly, but not exactly with hostility. Tony greeted her with medical directness.

"Why didn't you answer my letter?"

"That's right, you did write me a letter, didn't you, Galahad?"

Tony had hoped it was only Flannery who would call him that.

Marietta resumed her search, sighted a glint of white in the bushes, and emerged triumphant before Tony could help her.

"Yours is over to the right in the scrub oak, I think."

"Forget it. Why didn't you answer my letter?"

Marietta lit a cigarette and regarded him speculatively.

"After all, it's a fair question, Doctor. Why didn't I answer your letter? You write me apologizing for something or other, and just to make it nicer you say you don't think I'm a tramp. Sweet of you. I gather I must have been a great disappointment."

Tony flushed. "Skip it, Marietta. You know better.

Only—I'd like to box your ears, if my arms weren't so damned stiff. Say," he concluded lamely, "why do you act this way?"

Marietta laughed—impudently, but with a touch of compassion, and as suddenly became sober and speculative.

"Tony," she said, "I've wished more than once I could answer that one. You're not a bad guy. Just let it go at that. Period. No follow-up. You'll sleep better, and they tell me Westwood is taking everything you've got. What's the matter with your arms?"

Tony told her—briefly and in medical terms. Temporary paralysis. Gordon should have used clamps. He stretched his arms and succeeded in wiggling his stiff fingers slightly.

"All right now. How about finishing the round with me?"

Marietta studied him frowningly. Then, suddenly, she smiled. The half-hostile tension snapped, and again Tony felt the surge of desire he had experienced at their first meeting.

"Okay, Tony," said Marietta. "Have it your own way."

"Miss Marietta," reported Luthena, regarding Tony judicially, "Miss Marietta she says she'll be down in jus' half a minute."

"Thank you, Luthena," replied Tony, and resigned himself to a half-hour wait in the DoYLES' living room. Patience was only one of the things Marietta had taught him during the three weeks that followed their encounter on the golf links. Marietta, the lady had informed him, was not a nurse on any level of discourse. She wasn't taking orders. She lacked reverence for the male ego. She lacked remorse for her own faults and offences.

"You're a spoiled brat!" Tony had shouted on one occasion.

"Possibly," Marietta had agreed. "But that's not the half of it, Tony darling. The other half is that I'm just not sold on the sweet-little-woman idea as a career. I admit it's worked pretty well for Mother, but I'm a 1935 model, and you'll have to take me or leave me just about as you find me." Then, seeing Tony's exasperated frown, she had opened her arms to him mockingly and declaimed in a throaty contralto:

"Leave' muh, Galahad! I'm not worthy of you."

At which Tony had jumped up, thrown his hat in the corner of the room, and fairly jibbered with rage. Tony was serious. It was bad enough being in love, but to be alternately mocked and beguiled by a girl who offered everything and gave nothing was an experience for which his medical textbooks had failed to prepare him. He was in love. And Marietta liked him. And it was not really true that she gave him nothing. She gave him more excitement of various kinds than he had ever before experienced. With

seemingly deliberate callousness, she would outrage all his conventional notions concerning the relations of men and women. Then, just as genuine repulsion was beginning to cool his ardour, she would turn warmly pitying and even a little possessive. Invariably, at this point, Tony would propose marriage. And invariably, Marietta would point out a series of toughminded economic and other reasons why marriage was impossible, especially a marriage that meant staying in Darcey. What *was* possible, then?

At this point in his thinking, Tony's mind stopped short, even though his emotions didn't. He wasn't having any cheap affairs. He wasn't going to get himself or the girl tangled in the grapevine of Darcey gossip. He wouldn't, wouldn't—

"Tony!"

Marietta's entrance, as usual, was effectively staged. And this time her welcome, cheerfully disregarding the grinning Luthena, was, if anything, warmer than usual.

Wiping the lipstick from his cheek, Tony contemplated her admiringly—poured into something gay with her favourite bright red accents, and an absurd hat, black, on her glowing hair.

"Nice," he commented. "Ready to elope with me?"

To-day they had planned to enjoy one of the modest outings which Tony's slim pocketbook permitted, a trip on the mixed local to Hilltown.

"Got to be back by midnight," warned Tony. "I'm Cinderella now. Gordon bawled me out last time."

"Why didn't you tell him to go to the devil?"

"But, good Lord, you should know I can't do that. He's my boss. Anyway, he happened to be right. I've got work to do—patients I'm responsible for."

"Yes, Tony. Gordon is right. And you're a right guy. I suppose I ought to love you for it, shouldn't I, Tony?"

Tony sighed. "It wouldn't hurt to have a little sense . . . I've got something to tell you. Not now. Wait till we get on the train."

The Hilltown mixed local was a new experience for Tony. Cows moored and pigs grunted in the stock cars up ahead. The chairs of the half-baggage, half-passenger car in which they rode were of red plush, soiled and infinitely greasy. The closed, double windows of the coach were grey with smoke and soot. The enamelled tin water cooler, Tony declared, was the best thing he'd ever seen for the propagation of typhoid germs. And as for the single toilet, which men and women passengers both had to use with tact and discretion. . . .

The passengers were an entrancing hodge-podge. Farmers in muddy boots. Three children who paraded the aisles and looked longingly at the bananas and oranges, until Tony gave them the lot that he and Marietta had so

YOUNG DOCTOR

lavishly bought at the station stand. The fragrance of their feast filled the fusty air of the car. There were three negroes, two men, greased and pomaded and tailored to the point of acute discomfort, and a woman who wore a fur coat.

Tony took his turn at putting coal into the rusty little stove at one end of the car. He answered the farmers' comments on weather and crops gravely. He was pleasant to the conductor who came, several times, to lean over the back of their chairs and talk. This man knew Marietta—had, he said, known her before she was born. There wasn't a finer man on earth, he said, than Mike Doyle.

At Annville, half-way to Hilltown, a woman got on who was obviously big with child. Big? She was tremendous. Her advent, and condition, provoked Marietta into a typical display of outrageousness.

"I'm going to tell her that you are a doctor," she threatened, "so she'll feel more comfortable."

"Don't you dare!"

"But, Tony, the train bumps so—almost anything could happen. Think! You'd get your name in the paper. 'Stork Arrives on Mixed Local Number 17. Doctor McNeill, who was a passenger, makes difficult delivery.' In a book, it would mean the start of your career."

"Well, this is no book. My career is nicely started, Miss Doyle. And I'd thank you very kindly to shut your head."

They ate supper with the station master's wife at Hilltown—supper of cold baked chicken, hot biscuits, fried potatoes, and hickory-nut cake. Tony admired this last cinfektion so extravagantly that his hostess wrapped a newspaper around what was left of it and made him take it home with him. He wasn't able to pay for the meal, but he did tell her what caused bunions. He admitted there wasn't much to be done for them except to buy wider shoes.

Half-way on the return trip, Marietta began to show the fatigue caused by the jolting train and the bad air in the tightly closed coach. Putting her feet up on the next seat, she prepared to go to sleep.

"Marietta," said Tony. "Remember, I said I had something I wanted to tell you."

"Yes, Tony." Sleepily.

"Gordon came through last night."

"Oh, yeah?"

"Fifty per cent raise. A hundred and fifty bucks a month, beginning next month. I'm set, Marietta." He reached for her hand. "How about reconsidering that proposition I made to you—let's see, when was the last time?"

"Don't remember, Tony. Does it matter?"

"But, Marietta!" Tony flushed. "A hundred and fifty a month. Gordon says we could have the little cottage in

back of the north wing. No rent or laundry. You could. if you wanted to keep on at the school until——"

"Until hell freezes over," finished Marietta. "Or until we got so sick of each other and I got so sick of Darcey that I'd jump into the crick or elope with one of those truck drivers that go through here. Some likely guys on those trucks."

"Marietta!"

"All right, darling. I wouldn't shock you for anything. But I still say I've seen some likely guys on those trucks ——"

"Will you shut up and listen a moment?"

"Yes, Tony." There was both irony and sleepiness in her voice.

"We *could* get by on a hundred and fifty plus rent, you know. You wouldn't *have* to teach. Of course, we couldn't go wild on expenses."

Marietta laughed. "I spent a hundred and eighty this year just on my spring outfit."

"School money?"

"Yes, and then some."

"You mean Mike helps buy your clothes too?"

"Of course." She yawned and curled herself into the corner of the seat. "Tony, you're so sweet. And I'm a nasty little gold digger. And now I'm so sleepy."

"But Marietta, all young couples—nobody has much to start with. And it wouldn't be long. Westwood makes money, you know that. And Gordon is fair. I'll get more in another year. And Flannery—I've talked to him and he says I could look forward to a partnership some day with him and Gordon. Anyway, a physician's wife—we'd have standing in the community. You act as if . . ."

He paused. Marietta's lips were parted and through them came her not particularly refined version of a snore. In sleep, the face was not beautiful. Nor was it exactly weak or ugly. The sculpturing of the brow was clean and sharp—there she resembled Mike, he reflected. Only the heaviness of jaw, the sensual fullness of the relaxed mouth—these both offended and stirred him.

They were alone in the coach except for three drowsing passengers at the rear. Carefully, he drew her head on his shoulder and pressed his lips to hers. "Mum," she murmured sleepily, burrowing in his arms.

In the station, Marietta woke, refreshed and quite unembarrassed. They took a taxi home and she cuddled shamelessly all the way. On the porch of the Doyle home, Tony said firmly, "Good-night."

"Is that all?"

Tony surprised himself by the brutality with which he seized her.

"Why, Tony!" Her contralto laugh had in it a note of

victory, and her arms around his neck conveyed something more than tenderness.

Violently, Tony tore himself away and strode down the street, his nerves jangled, his lips mumbling curses.

"Damn her! She won't marry me. No, she'd rather—Damn her, is *that* what she wants?"

"Tony again?"

Barbara, in *négligé*, looked up from her task of painting her toenails a bright green.

"Sure, why not?"

"I never thought you'd really fall for a man."

"He's good, Bob."

"Yeah, I know, but where'll it get you?"

"Nowhere, probably."

"Would you marry him?"

"I might. I tell you, I'm gone on him."

"You'd have to live over at the hospital. Don't forget little Davy Gordon."

"Oh, I wouldn't marry Tony if he were working there. But if he'd go into private practice, I think Dad would set us up. Or maybe Dad could get him a swell job in the railroad hospital."

Barbara regarded the toenails. "How do they look?"

"Lousy. What do you think, Bob?"

"Well, from what I can see of the great and wonderful Tony McNeill, you'd better go easy on monkeying with his professional affairs."

"Yeah. I know. I called him up at the hospital once, and he gave me hell. He really did. Said if I ever tried it again, he'd be off me for life. He meant it. He's crazy about me, but he can put his foot down."

"It's all right with me."

"Bob?"

"Uh-huh?"

"Would you say I was much of a lady?"

"You mean refined?"

"Yeah."

"No, I wouldn't."

"Do you suppose I could pretend to be?"

"Well, if you mean just stop saying hell and damn—"

"I mean the whole hog. Be proper. Be modest. Innocent, too, I expect."

Barbara's laughter was raucous. "Are you crazy?"

"I guess so. He's got me wheely, Bob."

"Don't do anything rash, Marietta. Tony is a gentleman, all right. It sticks out all over him—the way he talks, and acts—but, from what I can see, he thinks you're all right just the way you are."

"He likes me—to fill up an evening after a hard day at his damned old hospital. But if it came to more than that,

I'm afraid not. He told me something about his mother once. Gosh! If she's like what I'm afraid she is, I can't see Tony introducing me to her as his wife. Sometimes I get so low about it I wish I were as refined as Carolyn Taylor."

"Then you're even crazier than I thought, and that's plenty crazy."

"I know, but she's got something that Tony likes in a girl. And that something is just exactly what I haven't got, and haven't any chance of ever getting. I may get by with Tony without it, but—I'm not betting on it."

"You've done well enough up to now," Barbara assured her sister. "I'd play my own hand, and get what I could out of it. I don't think we'll hear any squawks out of Tony. Men are all alike. You ought to know that by now."

"Yes and no," Marietta said. "Tony's the decentest guy I've ever met. I want him and he wants me. And he's a damned Boy Scout and—oh, I don't know. If we could only get out of Darcey——"

November 27, 1935.

SOCIAL NOTES

Mr. and Mrs. Mike Doyle, of Trask Avenue, had for guests at Thanksgiving dinner, besides their two daughters, Miss Marietta and Miss Barbara, their son, Doctor Arthur Doyle of Kansas City, Mr. and Mrs. Edward Leigh, Frank Kraft, and Doctor Anthony McNeill of Darcey.

—*Darcey Daily News.*

When Tony had been invited to Thanksgiving dinner, Mrs. Doyle told him joyfully that Arthur would be home—he didn't come often, he was so busy. Tony envied the man whom his mother could await as palpitantly as a girl expecting her lover.

"Are you sure you want me to come—an outsider?"

"You aren't an outsider, Tony, dear."

Gordon gave Tony the afternoon and evening—the staff was reduced as far as possible for the holiday; there were no operations, nor many dressings. Tony left the Doyle phone number at the desk in case of an emergency.

Tony liked being included in the Doyle family festivities. He knew that he was sentimental about hearths, and home ties, and such intangibles. The Doyle home had seemed to offer all these things in an ideal form. For that reason, it was quite a jolt to discover—completely out of the blue, because he had never thought that the Doyle son, "a physician practising in Kansas City," could be "Stinky" Doyle—to discover that Arthur Doyle was the medic who, in Tony's freshman year at Boone, had left the school, sud-

denly, under a particularly murky cloud of scandal and disgrace.

While Tony ate turkey and mashed potatoes and dressing and gravy, and cauliflower; while he accepted hot rolls and buttered them; while he ate and made polite small talk, he was remembering about the young man who was sitting there across from him now, picking at his food, uneasy at finding Tony here. There had never been definite charges—Doyle had disappeared, taking his degree *in absentia*. Tony remembered very well the thundering lecture the dean had given to the entire school on Professional Integrity and Personal Cleanliness. Among other things, he had said that a doctor had no more right to use his medical knowledge for private ends than a cashier in a bank had to take the money he handled and buy clothes with it.

Tony had never expected to be asked to break bread with the man who had occasioned this lecture; but it seemed he could be asked and, what is more, he could stuff himself to the gills with that same bread. He tried to take his part in the general conversation, hoping he didn't betray shock. He ate his salad and cranberry sherbet, and his mince pie with caramel sauce.

After the coffee, Tony suggested taking a walk. But people in Darcey never walked. The older folk got out a bridge table. Barbara turned on the radio, and she and Frank danced out in the hall. Those two never seemed to have much to say to each other, were content simply to be together. Arthur announced that he was going to have a nap. He hadn't enjoyed this encounter with Annie McNeill—he dared say nothing, not even to secure McNeill's promise of silence.

With Arthur gone. Tony felt a sudden lift of his spirits[~] and asked Marietta to dance. They were cheek to cheek when Tony looked up and saw Arthur watching them from the landing. "Damn," said Tony.

"What's the matter?"

But at this moment, just as they were close to the big front door, the bell rang.

Tony opened the inner door, and the storm door. The two youngest Flannery boys stood on the porch. They wore corduroy knickers and windbreakers. Jolly kids, the Flannerys. Their cheeks were rosy with cold, they had wooden guns over their shoulders, their mongrel dog sniffed at Tony's trousers. They grinned at Tony beguilingly.

"What's the trouble?" Tony asked them.

"Well, you know—down in the ravine—there's a sign—No Shooting—and there's two men with shotguns down there shooting at a target."

"A rifle," Michael corrected. "A Savage twenty-two."

"Well, anyway, they're shooting. And we thought you'd want to know."

"Dad doesn't let people hunt squirrels and rabbits in the ravine," Marietta explained to Tony. "The kids in this end of the town play down there, and he's afraid somebody will get hurt."

"Let's run 'em out," Tony suggested, his eyes bright. An adventure with the Flannery kids and their dog would be great fun.

"Aw, Tony——"

"Sure. Come on. Wait, you kids. I'll get my hat."

Marietta refused to go. Tony had become about convinced that Marietta didn't like children. She admitted that she hated to "climb around." But Tony went. Now it seemed as if he could not get back into the warm air of the house, and talk to Stinky Doyle. Gaily, he plunged down into the ravine with the two boys and their dog.

They had a grand afternoon. Tony wished Marietta did like kids. He wondered why she didn't. Probably because she saw too much of them in the schoolroom. Well, it really didn't matter.

The target shooters had escaped them, but Tony took a heavy black pencil and printed an impressive "Positively" above the No Shooting sign. Then he and the boys explored. Tony hadn't really meant to stay out all afternoon. But the boys had been wanting to show him the shaky cabin they'd built last summer. After inspecting it, they found several small caves to explore. Tony held tightly to Candy's harness while the four of them watched a mother squirrel carry her baby, swung by its four feet around her neck, from one tree-top home to safer, warmer quarters in a hollow tree. They found a persimmon tree with some fruit, and some buckeyes.

"And Tony——" Stephen plucked at his sleeve as they started up the ravine towards home. "Don't tell Dad we were at Doyles'. Remember, please."

Tony rubbed his jaw. "Aren't you supposed——"

"We can play in the ravine, but we can't go into Doyles' yard."

"Then you shouldn't have done it!" Tony assured them.

"But the men were shooting——"

"You'd better tell about the hunters. Yourself. I don't know why you were told not to go to Doyles', but very likely your mother had a good reason."

Tony watched the boys trudge down the street towards home. He wondered why Judith had told them to stay out of Doyles' place. He had rather thought the kids on Trask Avenue ran the lawns at will. Perhaps Mike had restricted his yard. Well, it couldn't make any difference to Tony.

It was almost dark when he let himself in Doyles' front door. He wasn't especially contrite—a run in the open air

was just what he had needed most after that big dinner. The house was quiet and apparently deserted. Except for Marietta, in red and black jersey pyjamas, curled up in a corner of the living-room divan, a plate of turkey sandwiches and some apples on the table at her elbow. Tony rubbed her cheek with his cold one. "I thought you were gone for good," she told him.

"I left my coat here."

"Oh, yes."

"Where is everybody?"

"Arthur went back to Kansas City. Mom and Dad and the Leighs drove to Columbus to get some air."

"There's air in Darcey, if you know where to look"

"You weren't here so they could ask you. Sit down, Boy Scout."

Tony piled three sandwiches into his left hand and sat down. He was glad enough that Stinky had gone back to where he lived. His presence in the Doyle household had jarred Tony.

Marietta had been expecting Tony to come back—she'd had these sandwiches made for him. Marietta ate like a bird. "Had a swell walk," he mumbled, his mouth full. "I like those kids." He fell to picking beggar lice off of his trousers.

"Tom Flannery's boys."

"You know the whole family?"

"Oh, yes. Judith and I don't mix well. She's a member of the Housewives' Protective Association."

"What do you mean?"

"Just that."

Tony laughed. "I take it you don't like Judith."

"She's okay. Maybe I'd take the same line if I were in her place."

Tony was more puzzled than ever.

"Do you have any of the Flannery boys in your school?" he asked.

"No. They go to Ashland. Stephen and Mike do. I teach at Emerson—all the tough mugs."

"Is that where you learn your dirty words?"

"I *teach*."

"Not those words, I hope."

"Tony, do you *have* to preach?"

He hadn't meant to be priggish, but perhaps it had sounded that way. He bit into the apple in his hand with a loud, crunching noise. "I don't have to," he admitted.

"You could be—different," she complained.

"I thought I was."

"Well, you're not as different as you think you are."

"What must I do?"

"Stop feeding your face. And—you might kiss me."

Tony deliberately finished the apple. Core and all. He

sat nibbling the stem, gazing into the fire. "I might," he agreed, at length, not moving. "Where's Bobby?"

"Oh, she and Frank are heating it up somewhere."

"Don't talk that way, Marietta. It——"

"I know what I'm saying."

Tony frowned. His forehead got very nobbly when he did. Her tone was threatening his feeling of ease and contentment here in the firelit room. "Barbara and Frank have gone together for some time, haven't they?"

"Years. Girls and boys pair off that way in high school here in Darcey. Everybody except me. I play the field."

Marietta wouldn't be so cross if she'd gone hiking with him. "Hasn't Frank a pretty good job?" Tony asked.

"Chief clerk. It's a swell job."

"Why don't they get married?"

"They will. Some day."

"But why wait?"

"They don't wait."

Tony stared. "Isn't that risky?" he asked. His pulse was racing.

"I expect they're careful. Besides, if Bobby gets caught, she can always get married."

"Caught? Oh, you mean pregnant."

"Do I?" Marietta's voice was taunting. "Good God, Tony, are you a doctor or aren't you?"

Tony considered. This was the first time the challenge had been put to him squarely. Well, he might as well have it out with her. And with himself at the same time.

"I'm enough of a physician," he said smoothly, "that I know the facts of life at least as well as Darcey's lay specialists on the subject, including yourself, Marietta, darling. I'm also enough of an animal that I have on occasion done things which, as a man, I later regretted."

Marietta laughed. "I hope, Tony, that in your base animal moments you remembered your physician's training sufficiently to—ah . . ."

Tony jumped to his feet. "You're incorrigible. Damn it, I've offered to marry you. I try to be decent. I try——"

But Marietta's anger as suddenly matched his own.

"You try what, you—Boy Scout! You try coming to a dirty little town that's been lousy with sex ever since I can remember, and you sniff like a middle-aged deaconess. You preach and patronize until I could yell. Sure, you asked me to marry you. And you're enough of a physician, you say, to know what it's all about. Well, I'm enough of a woman to think it's better and more decent for a girl to sleep with a man than it is for her to marry a man—any man—just because she's curious and hungry, and then be tied to some bum for life. Marry you and live on a hundred and fifty dollars a month? Marry you—why should I?

What sort of a man are you? How should I know? Oh, get out, get out!"

After which outburst, Marietta, to his intense amazement, threw herself on the sofa and burst into tears.

"You know," Tony said slowly, "that's the first time I've ever seen you cry. Is it—is it—because you like me?"

Marietta sat up and glared at him. "Like you? Like you!" Another outburst seemed imminent. Instead, she grew quiet and her expression changed to something resembling fright.

"Yes, I like you, Tony. God help me, I like you." Nervously, Marietta dried her eyes and repaired her ruined make-up. "You're a swell guy and you wouldn't take advantage of a girl for anything, would you, Tony? And some day you're going to be one of the leading citizens of Darcey. And Marietta's a fool, isn't she, Tony? Good-night, Tony. If you don't mind. Good-night." She pushed him out of the door.

Chapter Six

"CAROLYN."

"Yes, Mother."

"Mrs. Peck is here to try on your dance dress."

"In a minute, Mother." *Life comes to me a youth with winged embrace.* Carolyn, nestled deep in a chair by her window, searched for words to fit the music in her head. Words solemn and gay both, Bach-mood words in a classic form. Sonnet? *He brings the touch of fire in his limbs—*

"Carolyn."

"I'm coming, Mother." *In his eyes tenderness, on his tongue grace.*

It should be a rhythm like a heartbeat. Clear, steady, regular. *In his hands courage—*

"I have called you twice, Carolyn. If you want your dress fitted properly, you had better come at once. It is absolutely rude not to obey immediately when your mother calls you. After all my training . . ."

Mrs. Taylor came into the room just as Carolyn turned the lock on the little book, with its inevitable *My Diary* in gold on the cover. "I can't imagine what all you have to write in that diary of yours. One would think you were the belle of Darcey the way you scribble and scribble constantly. In my day, we had no time for such things; we were too busy helping our mothers and being pretty and gay. I must say it is not very nice of you to keep it locked all the time. I hope we are all ladies and gentlemen here.

No one would think of reading it; it is most unladylike to imply you do not trust us, not even your own mother."

In his hands courage . . . "I'm sorry, Mother. Is Mrs. Peck in the sunroom?" *Courage not to cease . . .*

They went across the hall to the large room cluttered with old wicker furniture and piles of fashion magazines. Mrs. Taylor had chosen a stiff green brocade, and for once the choice was becoming to her daughter. The model, obviously reminiscent of Mrs. Taylor's gowns when she was a girl—or belle, as she had said—had a formal quaintness that transformed Carolyn into a romantic lady out of a portrait gallery. Above it, her pale face took on the chiselled, delicate lines of a cameo, and her dark eyes glowed softly.

Oh, Mother! It's really lovely," the girl exclaimed as she turned slowly before the tall old-fashioned pier glass. *Not to cease building with bricks and veils a tower of dreams. . . .*

"Well! I'm glad you agree with my taste this time! I declare, young girls nowadays are so head-strong, I don't know what the world is coming to. Turn around, let me see the back."

"Don't you think it ought to be taken in a little more at the waist, Mrs. Taylor?" said Mrs. Peck as she pinned the dress more tightly above Carolyn's hips.

Dubiously Mrs. Taylor looked at the result. "I'm afraid it brings out the . . . bosom a little too much, Mrs. Peck. It might seem a little . . . brazen."

"Oh, but Mrs. Taylor, it shows off her pretty figure so well!"

"Perhaps Mother is right," said Carolyn shyly. "Maybe it would be better the way it was."

"I'm sure, Carolyn, that Mrs. Peck wouldn't suggest it if it weren't entirely proper. I do believe there is something charming about it. It reminds me of the days when we were laced in so tightly we could hardly breathe. Well, if one waits long enough all the styles come around again."

"Then I'll leave it tight, Mrs. Taylor. And I'll just raise the shoulders a little, and cut the neck lower. Miss Carolyn has pretty shoulders; we may as well show them off."

"They're a little bony. I can't understand why Carolyn should be so thin; the other children are all strong and healthy-looking. In my day, a girl with a figure like hers would have to pad it all out; it wasn't admired to look like a straight stick. Of course, I never had to, but—"

"And a touch of lace showing right here in front. What do you think, Mrs. Taylor?"

"Very nice. You may wear my diamond brooch if you like, Carolyn. The heirloom."

Building with bricks and veils a tower of dreams, beyond—

"Carolyn!"

"I beg your pardon, Mother. I must have been thinking of something else and didn't hear what you said."

"I offered to let you wear my brooch! You might have had the grace to listen when we're taking so much trouble to make this ball a success for you!"

"I'm sorry, Mother. Thank you so much, I'd love to wear the brooch. That is, if you think it will look nice on this dress."

"I'm sure I wouldn't have suggested it if I were not confident of my taste in the matter. I declare——"

"All right, Miss Carolyn. Will you slip out of it now, please? I don't think we'll need any more fittings. I'll finish the dress to-day, in plenty of time for you, and I do hope you will have a marvellous time in it."

"Thank you, Mrs. Peck. It's nice of you to take so much trouble," said Carolyn between the folds of rustling material, as the dress was lifted over her head.

"If you don't need me for anything, Mother, I think I'll take a walk."

"Don't be too long. You know the dinner cards have to be made. Besides, it's cold out, and you might catch a chill. You would not look very pretty going to a ball with snuffles in your nose."

"I won't get a chill." She raced into her coat, hat, rubbers (she didn't dare forget them), and slipped quickly downstairs, closing the door on the Taylor mansion with a quiet, but nonetheless vicious, thud.

It was a bright, frosty day. Along Trask Avenue, every house was garlanded with holly and evergreen. Door after door showed its big, exclamatory red satin bow. There were little trees in some yards, strung with coloured bulbs. Curtains drawn back in living-room windows showed occasionally the tinselly disorder of trees being trimmed. To-morrow would be Christmas, with the dance that night.

Again the music in Carolyn's head drowned out the jangle of the eternal bickering with her mother. In her teens, she used to flash angrily back, answering her mother's acid commentaries immediately, irrelevantly, with blind fury. But when she found herself dreaming of murders and other catastrophes in which the whole Taylor family except herself and Joseph perished. Carolyn rammed her thoughts down, choked back her answers, and discovered release in shifting her mind quickly to something remote and beautiful. The piano, poetry, walking—Carolyn used all these deliberately as escape valves, finding that in the course of such escapes her rage was transformed into exaltation. She soared.

Because almost nobody in Darcey, and especially on Trask Avenue, walked much, the neighbours could have charted the atmospheric pressure in the Taylor house-

hold by the speed and frequency of Carolyn's walks. But they were accustomed to thinking of her as a peculiar girl and did not, therefore, pay much attention.

Except for a young mother wheeling a baby, she was the only person out on the avenue to-day. The cold whipped at her face and she fought with it joyously. She was not thinking about where she was going. Unconsciously, she turned out towards Westwood, and as she walked her legs swung into the rhythm of her poem. She picked up the last line and let her mind go, beating time with her hand.

*In his hands courage, not to cease
Building with bricks and veils a tower of dreams
Beyond and in the centre of the wheel of things ;
In his mouth madness, on his heart, peace.
Running upon a road we meet and ends
A long bewildered and tormented race. . . .*

"Hallo, Carolyn ! Merry Christmas to you !" It was Judith, smiling at her as the Flannery car stopped in front of their house.

"Hallo, Carolyn ! Merry Christmas," chorused the Flannery boys.

"Hallo yourself. Have you been shopping ?"

"We were buying things for the tree. Won't you come in and help us trim it ? It's going to be a real old-fashioned one, with strings of popcorn, and candles——"

"Come on in and help us, Carolyn. And tell us the rest of the story we were reading in school."

"It wouldn't be fair to tell you and make the rest of the class wait," laughed Carolyn. "But I will come in for just a minute, maybe just long enough to tell you the ballad of the Diplodocus."

"Diplo . . . what ?" giggled Michael, the younger.

"Did you ever see a baby Diplodocus ?

Did you see a Diplodocus lay an egg ?"

recited Carolyn solemnly.

"Milne ?" smiled Judith.

"No, original," Carolyn answered laughing. "That's as far as it goes. Maybe the Flannerys can finish it."

"What's a Diplodinkus ?" asked John seriously.

"Diplodocus. It's a giant lizard. It used to live many thousands of years ago, in China."

"Do lizards lay eggs ?"

They were in the comfortable living-room now, unpacking the boxes of Christmas-tree ornaments Judith had just bought. The fresh, spicy smell of the enormous tree filled the room. The boys had grabbed apples from the bowl on the table, and were biting great chunks out of them hilariously. Carolyn strung popcorn and answered questions

about prehistoric monsters. Both Michael and John thought the names were very funny. "Diplodocus, Brontosaurus, Dinosaurus," they chanted, capering around the room and snuffing like puppies.

Then they started another game. The strung popcorn gave Michael an idea. He began to wind it around Carolyn's head, shouting, "Carolyn's a tree, Carolyn's a tree!" John picked up a handful of Christmas ornaments and some strings of tinsel to finish the job.

"Whoever heard of a sitting tree?" said Carolyn.

"Sitting tree, sitting tree, stand up then so you'll grow," sang the boys, and pulled her up, dragging her to the middle of the floor.

She crooked out her arms "for branches," and then Michael and John thought Judith was right—she really needed a candle to top it all off. They were trying to balance a bright green one on her nose when the doorbell rang and Tony walked in, his hands full of packages.

"Merry Christmas, Flannerys! Oh! Merry Christmas, Miss Taylor! I say, are they trying to make a martyr out of you?"

Hastily Carolyn unwounded herself from the tinsel and popcorn, but the boys had hooked ornaments on her clothes and hair, and both Judith and Tony had to help remove them. The boys wouldn't. They wanted to go on with the game. "What's the matter with you, Carolyn?" said John. "Just because Tony came in, you stop playing with us! Are you afraid of Tony, or something?"

"I have to go home," said Carolyn quickly.

"She's a fugitive from Doctor McNeill," grinned Tony. "Afraid of all my germs."

"Mother's expecting me, really," Carolyn told them.

Tony helped her into her coat. "Are you walking?" he asked.

"Yes, but it would take you out of your way," said Carolyn.

Judith gurgled: "How to lose friends and alienate people! Carolyn, your technique is marvellous! I should have tried it on Tom."

Laughing, Tony took Carolyn's arm and they started down Trask Avenue. "All set for to-morrow night?" he asked, looking down at her. Lord, she *was* small!

"I do hope you won't find it disappointing," Carolyn answered, diffidently. *Life comes to me a youth with winged embrace.*

"I'm looking forward to a round of brilliant gaiety, as the society pages say. What colour are you wearing?"

"Green. And you?" she giggled.

"Royal purple, with ermine stitchings down the front, and ruffles on the bias. An heirloom, you know. My grandmother's wedding gown."

As they went past the front doors of Darcey's "best people," their progress was registered by mothers and daughters busy preparing for the holidays—and especially for the dances, which loomed higher on the social landscape than Santa Claus. Comments unheard by Carolyn and Tony trailed behind them like Clues in a paper chase. "Oh, Arline! There goes Carolyn with that young Westwood doctor!"

"Really?" Why, I thought he was going with Marietta!"

"Maybe Marietta has thrown him over."

"If she has, that means there's a new man in town. I hadn't heard of any. Do you suppose he could be giving her a dose of her own medicine?"

"Where could they be going, on a cold day like this and right in the middle of the afternoon?"

And so on, with variations. The voices could have built up a chorus: "There goes Carolyn with that young doctor! There goes Carolyn! There goes that young doctor! And Marietta..."

And Marietta? Marietta saw them too, from the window of her room; but she made no comment. She was trying on her dance dress, turning slowly around in front of her sister Barbara, who was sprawled in a big chair, smoking.

"What do you think of the sandals, Bob?" Marietta held out one silver-shod foot.

"Nifty. Get them at Stewart's?"

"No, Tony gave them to me."

"Really? How did he know what size?"

"I told him."

"You little gold digger!" said Barbara, amused.

"I told him he might as well give me something I wanted, if he was going to get me a Christmas present anyhow, and of course he was. I told him I'd run short on the money Dad gave me, and he just asked, surprised, 'Does Mike buy your clothes?'"

Barbara burst out laughing. "Does he think squirrel coats and two-dollar stockings are the regulation budget wardrobe for school ma'ams, or something? I'll bet he doesn't even notice what grand clothes you always wear."

"He does, too. At least he notices more than most men. And he has good taste, considering he doesn't know chiffon from brocade."

"Is he taking you to the dances?"

"He's taking Carolyn Taylor to-morrow night. I guess I'll go with him New Year's."

"Oh. How did Carolyn rate the Christmas date?"

"They've had it for weeks. I guess Mrs. Taylor got her good work in early."

"She'll have to get in a lot more to compete with you, Mary. I wouldn't stay up nights worrying if I were you."

"I'm practically wasting away from worry, can't you

see? But, seriously, if he begins dating Carolyn . . . won't my face be red!"

"It'll be a sign of something or other. Like the world coming to an end."

"Yes," said Marietta oddly. "Like the world coming to an end is right."

Tony walked back to the hospital feeling very gay and very much at home. It was getting dark and the lighted trees out on the lawns gave Trask Avenue a carnival air. Tony had bought and sent a gift to his mother. He had had a gorgeous time ordering the books for Tom's boys—stories he himself had loved, with new illustrations by Rackham and Willy Pogany. There would be a tree at the hospital, and members of the staff had drawn names. Tony had drawn John Oliver's, and, suspecting the hospital party would have its jokes, had bought the boy a noisy alarum clock, as well as a handsome brushed-wool sweater.

Gordon was cranky, Tom had warned him, about any of the staff appearing to shower gifts on the town. He would please not so much as send cards, nor even flowers, to the hostesses who had been kind to him during the year. "Of course, if you want to give your best girl a sable coat . . ." grinned Tom.

"Chinchilla, Tom. And pearls."

Contemplating his holiday preparations, all made and ready, Tony felt smugly virtuous. He had unpacked his tail coat and examined it carefully. It was old, and tight across the shoulders. With reluctant caution, he decided it would have to do, and had it sent to be pressed. His stiff shirts had already come back from the laundry. Flowers had been ordered for Carolyn to wear to-morrow night, Camellias. He had guessed well. They would look beautiful with green, and bring out the delicacy of her face. He had tried to find freesias, but the only white blossoms available were camellias; somehow, nothing seemed right for her except white. And for Marietta—a great splash of orchids, of course, to wear New Year's Eve.

The hospital tree on Christmas morning was fun. There were sly digs at pet vanities, old jokes revived. The nurses showered Tony with the gaudiest neckwear Woolworth's could provide. He'd wear every one, he promised. There were tarlatan socks of candy and nuts, and a tremendous orange for every one. The whole place glowed with Christmas spirit. Even Gordon was chummy, and Asy had relaxed his usual mournful frown and was beaming like a patriarch.

Darcey had been very generous in its Christmas remembrance of Westwood. Gordon had received a huge stack of cards and gifts, and Tony, too, had been Santa Claused by townspeople and patients. His gifts ranged from a

quilted satin dressing gown, from Mrs. Rhodes, to a jar of country sosage, redolent with sage.

That evening, the entire hospital was on hand when Tony emerged from his room, dressed for the Taylor dinner and the dance. The nurses off duty hung over the stair railing, at a risk of life and limb, and, like a bevy of sisters, critically admired his glory of white linen and black worsted. They made him take off his overcoat to display the full effect. Tony was not a little embarrassed at all the excitement, even though he knew tails were a novelty in Darcey. The nurses were nice girls—much nicer than many he would probably dance with that evening—but somehow they did not go to the Christmas dances. Nor did their men friends wear tails. Girls who passed most of their days in uniform, among doctors in short-sleeved gowns, felt thrilled, indeed, at the sight of satin lapels and high-waisted, pleated trousers with silk braid down the sides. They were ever so proud of their doctor's social flights. Even Gordon, strolling out of his office, smiled approval behind his glasses. "It's beginning to snow," he said. "Better call a taxi."

All the way to the Taylors', Tony wished he could stop at the Doyles' instead. He was feeling ready for a high old time. A date with Carolyn was like having tea somewhere. For a minute, he thought he would stop at Marietta's anyway—just to kiss her merry Christmas. Then he remembered she would be at one of the buffet-and-cocktail parties that the Younger Marrieds and the college crowd were having. There was one at Tom's—Tony heard the clatter and laughter as his taxi rolled sedately by.

When he saw Carolyn, he felt a little better. She was another girl—a frail, quaint lady in moss green, with his camellias at her waist. She had drawn her hair down softly in some old-fashioned way, and had tucked one of the flowers into it, low on her neck. There was something about her that stirred old memories—something way back in his infancy, maybe. He might have seen a picture. She seemed as familiar as a Canadian spring to him. Watching her gave him a strange sense of warmth mixed with distress. What was it, what could it be? As if she were somebody he was afraid of, yet must follow around, fearing to lose her. Somebody he wanted all to himself.

"You look very lovely," he told her, trying to shake off the spell in conversation.

"Thank you. I'm so glad."

"What have you done to your hair?"

A little startled, she looked up smilingly. "Don't you like it?"

"Very much. What did you do?"

"I'm afraid I was a stubborn girl. Mother wanted me to

have it waved in the latest style, but somehow this seemed . . . nicer, with this dress. And it seemed to suit your flowers better, too."

"Nice. Do you suppose all sons and daughters argue with their mothers? I know I did."

"Oh, and I thought you must have been such an obedient little boy."

"I always tried to be. But I was a monster of ingratitude by the time I went away to school."

"Your mother must be so proud of you now. If I had been a boy, I think I should have wanted to be a doctor."

"Ha! You should hear Tom Flannery on what a doctor's life is like. He'd give you the low-down and disillusion you for ever."

"Oh, Tom! He makes fun of everything. But I think doctors—at least some doctors—are wonderful people. They're doing something useful, and clean, and . . . and noble." *In his hands courage, not to cease building.* "They call you Galahad, don't they?"

"Ouch! You too, Brutus! If you start on that, I'll call you . . . I'll call you . . ."

"What?"

"The Lady of . . . (the Camellias? Lord, no!) . . . the Lady of Shalott, or something."

"Charlotte?" Mrs. Taylor, straining to hear, interrupted. "Are you talking about Charlotte Mason, Doctor McNeill?"

They were sitting in that hideous dining-room, eating quantities of overcooked, underseasoned food. It was a large, haphazard party, assembled with no relation to age or sex. The result, in the Taylor atmosphere of prim formality, was inevitably boring. Only Mr. Taylor, Carolyn, and Tony seemed to be enjoying themselves. Mr. Taylor was launched on one of his booming endless monologues, this time about an inaugural ball he had attended in his youth. He remembered every detail except the name of the governor, and worried about that, conversationally, back and forth for minute after minute. "It's right on the tip of my tongue, you know. He was a very important man in his day. I can't imagine why the name escapes me. Let me see, he was supposed to be even presidential timber. Was it Pearson? MacPherson? It's right on the top . . ." If this dinner was tradition in Darcey society, its survival indicated superhuman effort on somebody's part.

To Tony, the dance which was held at the Elks' Club, seemed flat and dispirited too. All Darcey's elite was there—from great-grandmothers of eighty-six to schoolgirls of sixteen—and all, without exception, elaborately overdressed and coifed. The older folk supposedly sat in the balcony but few apparently except Mrs. Taylor and the most decrepit old ladies, wanted to. Fanny Rhodes, for instance, was very much in evidence on the dance floor, being

coquettish and arch inside mountains of baby-blue frills and ruffles. The hall was loaded with tinsel and evergreen decorations. But the music was good. An orchestra had been brought in from the city.

Tony was a good dancer; he had always enjoyed it. Carolyn danced like a good but uninspired pupil of a refined Saturday-afternoon class. There weren't nearly enough men; the youngest and gayest were still at the cocktail parties. What men there were made the dutiful rounds of the grandmothers and the schoolgirls. In due course, they got around to Carolyn, unenthusiastically. Tony found himself wishing for an old-fashioned dance with a programme, which he could fill for her among his friends and relieve himself of the vague sense of failure that was beginning to rise in him.

She wasn't having a very good time—and who could, Tony argued with himself hotly, with that bunch of dodoes? You could see they had no taste; look at the changes that these provincial dolts could ring on that most inelastic of costumes, a man's dress suit. The dance was formal: they had dined that in his ears for weeks. Formal! There were dinner coats and tail coats, white ties and black ties mixed indiscriminately with the wrong vests, and any kind of shoes. As to gloves—the few who wore them, including Tony, were positively conspicuous!

About midnight, when his friends began to drift in, Tony made a determined effort to better the run of Carolyn's partners. She had been in the pudgy arms of the town's perennial bachelor, a moth-eaten dentist, and some of the boys who were in her classes at school had given her a turn or two. Her father's friends, overgallant, had strutted into the picture also. No girl could have a good time with a collection like that. The fact that she seemed quietly resigned to it filled Tony with wrath. By George, any girl has a right to have a good time, and especially a darn sweet girl like this. If they could only see it, she was as pretty as any girl in the room—and daintier than all of them, too.

But the men he knew were not very co-operative. They promised, vaguely, to cut in later. Most of them dodged. Those who did dance with the girl went round as if they were performing a chore. She was silent and seemed unhappy with them, and that didn't help much. Apparently she didn't know how to carry on the dizzy repartee which was the conventional language of the Younger Marrieds. She didn't seem to recognize any of the cues. From his place in the stag line, or as he danced with one girl and another, Tony kept his worried eyes on Carolyn, wondering whether her dull evening wasn't her fault too. She couldn't talk to Eric Lowe, or Jim Wood, or any of the men who were popular successes with the other girls.

For the fifth time—it felt like the fiftieth—he rescued

her. And then Jessie, buttoned up as tightly as if he were corseted, and smelling of cheap cigarettes and myrrh, pranced up smirking. She was as sweetly polite to him as she had been to all the rest, making no distinction whatsoever: handsome redheads like Eric, and paunchy dentists were apparently all the same to her. She hadn't even seemed to notice—as every person on the floor had—the exhibition Jessie had been giving with Fanny Rhodes, practically nestling among her billows, making raw remarks in a high-pitched voice and neighing with silly laughter. Oh, hell! The trouble with Carolyn was—she was such a *lady*!

He was standing against a pillar, looking disgruntled, when Tom Flannery came up and slapped him heartily on the back.

"Hiya, Samson!"

It was sudden, and Tom had the muscles of a piano mover. "What the devil!"

"Take it slow, son. Take it slow. Drink, dance, and be merry, for to-morrow..."

"Damn these social exhibitions, anyhow!" said Tony, irritably.

"Now, Tony. Don't tear the temple down. The town has a thousand eyes... and what an ear! Tell you what, you go on the loose for the next half-hour—no scruples, no manners, no nothing—and I'll take on the pure and fragile Carolyn."

"Thanks. She's doing fine," said Tony sullenly.

"Easy, son. A drink will do it, and Marietta is the lass yonder—in the red dress. In case you hadn't noticed." He grinned. "Run along now and get your medicine, and don't argue with your family doctor."

Why not? He'd been wanting to ever since she came in half an hour or so ago. The list of men she had danced with since was long and complicated, but Tony could have recited it without the smallest error. His face relaxed, and lighted. "Okay, Tom. Thanks." He beelined, with not indecent haste he hoped, towards the fluid, scarlet flag of Marietta. *Danger. Oh, luscious, wonderful danger...*

The red—geranium-red and delicate as the petals of an exotic flower—was veiled provocatively around her soft white shoulders and swirled down to the tips of the silver sandals. (*He had bought those sandals! The slippers he had bought were on her lovely feet... hell with the camellias.*) She was a flame of loveliness, tipped with gold. Men crowded and pushed around her as if she—as if she were an oriental slave girl on the mart, or something. Damn swine! Laughing, frothing, she danced a few steps with one, was whirled away by another. She was... she was as desirable, as unattainable, as a spark of marsh fire.

Sullen again, Tony turned, went out on the dance floor

and touched the shoulder of the man who was dancing with Judith Flannery. "Do you mind?" and rested his jangled nerves in the clear waters of her presence.

"We missed you at our party, Tony."

"Thanks. I'm sorry I couldn't come. I was officiating at one of Darcey's oldest traditions."

"What's the matter, Tony? You sound so irritated—just like Tom."

Deftly, he guided her around a lad of seventeen who was almost too drunk to stand, and wished he knew how to ask her what to do about Carolyn. He could see she was stiffer even, with Tom, than she had been with his other friends. Tom . . . who could make the austere Mother Superior of a Catholic academy bridle like a schoolgirl. Oh, what's the use? One man alone, no matter how willing, can't make a fool stick of a girl into the belle of any ball.

Doctor Herbert cut in on them, just a little too late to hear Judith's whispered: "Darn! Here comes that Herbert ape."

Marietta was dancing with Eric. *He holds her like an apache, the fool. It's indecent.* Tony cut in.

"Mind, Eric? Hallo, beautiful!"

"Why, it's young Doctor McNeill! How's the social career, Galahad?"

"Shut up or I'll spank you, right out here in the middle of the floor!"

"Oh, oh! Wouldn't that be lovely! Don't let your inhibitions stop you, Tony, please. I'd love to be spanked by you," looking up at him like a . . .

"Jezebel! I adore you. *Down with love,*" he sang. "*Give it back to the birds, and the bees, and the Viennese.* In about two seconds, I'm going to kiss you. *Down with love.*"

Her blue eyes had reckless provocation in them. She had been drinking, but her lips were soft and full and red as a baby's. "More," she whispered huskily. His arm tightened, and her shoulder, Marietta's lovely white shoulder, pressed into the hollow of his own. His cheek went down against hers. "Let's get out of here," he murmured.

"Mind, Doc?" Ted Dameron cutting in. Tony let him circle the hall with his girl, then caught them as they came past.

"That's not fair, Doc!" protested Ted, but helplessly. Tony made a face at him over Marietta's hair, her soft, golden, perfumed hair.

"Look out! There's Manny Roberts." He veered at an abrupt angle, Marietta's gossamer skirts whirling about them both.

"Having a good time, Tony?" Again that look that sent blood rushing to his head.

"I am now," he said, with his lips against her ear.

"Answer Number 8 B. I meant . . . Are you enjoying the trade between me and Lady Carolyn?"

"Hush. There's nobody like you."

"But Carolyn is such a nice girl, Tony."

"Yes. And you're so soft and beautiful you're driving me insane. Marietta, I . . ."

Again somebody cut in. He cut back, and lost her, and cut in again. It was a tantalizing process, delightful and maddening. Each time the few brief minutes with her were like sips of some delicious, heady wine.

When supper was announced, he went in search of Carolyn. He was flushed and smiling. He had discarded his gloves, and a brilliant clip from Marietta's frock was in the lapel of his coat. His carnation was tucked into Marietta's curls, for all Darcey to see and giggle at.

"I don't believe I care to stay for supper, Doctor McNeill," said Carolyn listlessly. "I am a little tired."

"But you don't want to go home so early!"

"Would you mind?"

"No. Of course not. I'm sorry you're tired." He went to fetch her wrap and his own coat. He could hear the noisy laughter and hullabaloo in the supper room. Sighing, he went back to the doorway where Carolyn waited, talking to Mrs. Leigh. She had such a charming way with older people, damn it. Old people belong in bed at night. He slipped her wrap, an old-fashioned cape of pale blue broadcloth, over her shoulders and ran down ahead of her to find a taxi.

They sat silently as the car started up Main Street towards Trask Avenue. "Tony"—she touched his arm, oh, very lightly—"did you know—when you brought Doctor Flannery to ask me for a dance—that he had been drinking?"

"He'd had a drink," said Tony briefly.

"I should have thought you wouldn't want me to dance with men who . . ."

"For God's sake, Carolyn! I suppose your mother has taught you that any girl who'd dance with a man who had had a drink was ruined for ever, or something! I thought you'd have better sense!"

Oh, dear. He shouldn't have said that. There she sat with a tragic look on her face, as if there had been a death in the family. Gently, he put his arm around her. "I'm sorry, Carrie."

"It's all right." She sat up stiffly. "I—just thought you were—different."

He helped her out of the cab, took her up the steps to the porch, lighted as were nearly all the other porches on Trask Avenue to-night. She held out her hand. Tony took it, bent and kissed her cheek. Perfunctorily. It was his habit to kiss every girl goodnight after a date, the

thing all fellows did. Carolyn's swift protest and struggle shocked him to the heels. He stood dazed on the porch for a minute after she had gone inside and closed the door. Well!

He ran down the steps and walk, angry clear through. If he'd tried to make a pass at her . . . But to resist so strongly something that didn't mean a thing, that was as impersonal as a handshake . . . *As if I were a leper. For heaven's sake?*

He'd show Miss Taylor! With his mouth already open to direct the taxi driver—he was going back to the dance and raise hell!—he suddenly changed his mind. Yes, he would show her all right, but all Darcey would see as well. Including Marietta. Every sense, every muscle in his body cried out for Marietta; only the feel of her in his arms for five minutes would be glory. But, Carolyn had looked swiftly, quite plainly, at that clip in his buttonhole. Silly girl, probably stuffed full of romantic ideas. If he went back, he'd spoil the evening for her even more completely. After all, he had been her escort. Darcey would make plenty of the fact that, after he'd taken her home—and before supper, too!—he'd come back and made a show of himself with Marietta. And Marietta . . . she'd be insufferable—oh, adorably insufferable—but he would be grovelling ever after, just the same. No he'd go decently home to bed. No gal would put a ring in his nose!

From the dark window of her room, Carolyn watched the cab roll down Trask Avenue.

*Running upon a road we meet, and ends
That long bewildered and tormented race.*

Fumbling, she unpinning his camellias, took them in her hands. She pressed their heavy fragrance against her face, wetting them with her tears. *And ends . . .* Almost frantically, she kissed the wilting flowers, bit them, crushed them, and thrust them down inside her dress. The wires and tinsels scratched her as she threw herself down on the bed, sobbing into the pillow.

*And ends a long bewildered and tormented race.
Then suddenly one day I look,
And there is nothing in his face.*

Chapter Seven

"SOME TIME about the middle of the last century a covered wagon, lurching over the sandy plain north of what is now Darcey, cast a wheel, and the long emigrant train of which it was a part went on. Indians spied the

stranded pioneers and massacred them. The children, especially, screamed piteously as the tomahawks fell. The wheel stayed in the sand and more sand covered it, leaving only the hub exposed.

"This," Jessie would say to the awed visitor, with a casual gesture at the chandler above his desk, "is the wheel." Thus he would conclude one of the wholly fictional narratives that went with each item of the furnishings of his bachelor apartment: the ancient shoe-maker's bench; the stool made out of a butter churn; the stone jars that served as table lamps; the ox yoke on which the visitor was invited to hang his coat; the opium pipe, crossed with an Indian pipe of peace that hung above the fireplace.

Occasionally, a relatively sophisticated visitor would leave remarking to himself that Jessie, too, was something of curio; Jessie, pale, unhealthy—at his cellarette, pouring cocktails with his slightly shrill heartiness.

The mixture of styles in his dwelling place was much like the hodge-podge of his column in the *Darcey News*: one part Greenwich Village, one part O. O. McIntyre's version of the Hotel Algonquin, and three parts Darcey. Jessie, the son of a too-fond mother, had never been allowed to play with the other boys. Now the other boys, approaching middle age, still made a wide path around Jessie. Yet Jessie's column was read. He had a flair. In any case, the owner of the newspaper was uncomfortably aware that it would be embarrassing to fire Jessie.

On this particular morning, Jessie, having sent tomorrow's column to the paper, was engaged in the form of composition in which he liked best to release his talents. He was concocting, for his own wistful amusement, such an all-embrasive series of paragraphs as he would never be allowed to print.

"This new doc that old Gordon took on last spring is something out of a Horatio Alger book. 'Galahad,' they call him. He-man type, handsome as a collar ad. Doctor Anthony McNeill, if you please, with an Oxford accent (phony, he's a Canadian—comes from McGill University by way of Boone) and all set up with a shiny new kit of ethics. Boy, is he pure! You can smell formaldehyde on him a block away. Works like a horse at Westwood. Gordon loves him like a son. Like a son.

"Now see what happens. Galahad runs into some of Mattie Jordan's fancy work—and does he throw an ethical tantrum! Swears he'll get that poor old witch if it's the last thing he does. A few weeks later I hear he makes a trip out to Cypress Flats to dig up some more dirt. Naturally he finds plenty—with the help of Garms, the little redhead who once wanted to give me a smack in the puss! Well, Garms thinks he can afford to play with Galahad on this. Even Gordon is going along—the old fool! You

can imagine Herbert's state of mind. He was here night before last telling me his troubles—nervous as a wet hen. He had himself all slated for Galahad's job, you know—he's just dumb enough to believe that famous bedside manner of his is enough to cover up all the medical messes he's left around this town, including the bum clean-ups he's done for Mattie. Says he doesn't know how much Galahad has learned, but he's got to be stopped quick. Naturally, yours truly didn't say no to that.

"And Herbert isn't the only one of the Hippocrats who's sore at Westwood. There never was much sweetness and light between Gordon and the majority of the profession, as you know, but now it seems our Galahad has been stirring up the hornets' nest some more. He's been sending pailfuls of statistics to Public Health. I remember the circus when old Saunders got started on some of the same, trying to clean up Cypress Flats and corresponding with Public Health. They thought all that was safely buried in the old coot's grave, when some more letters started coming from Public Health, asking do they want a syphilis clinic set up? They do—in a pig's neck, of course. If you ask this crystal gazer, something odd is going to happen to our Galahad's professional career.

"It won't take long, I hazard, before opportunity will knock at our door. Such a busy young man is bound to step into something. Besides which, Marietta the trouble-shooter has roped him in, and almost any time now she's going to get tired of calf love. A good place to oversee that show would be Fanny Rhodes's parlour. There are trees and shrubs between, of course, but . . . I'm looking forward to something interesting there one of these nights."

This sheet of paper Jessie folded and slipped into a thin, crimson-lined envelope. Taking a stick of iridescent sealing wax, he burned a blob on the exact centre of the envelope flap. While a small flame still flickered on the wax, he stamped it with the crest of the ring he usually wore on the third finger of his left hand. It was a heavy, silver affair, and had a lover's-knot in snakes worked out on it in high relief. Finally, and still with the air of performing a ritual, Jessie slipped the ring back on. He locked the envelope away in a small metal chest half filled with similar ones. Then he dressed, got into his overcoat, took hat, gloves (alas, the malacca stick just couldn't be carried in Darcey) and went jauntily out.

Half an hour later, Darcey's Number One wit, dandy and man about town rang the front bell at Fanny Rhodes's house. A brief stop at the barber-shop, and another at the town's most popular drug store soda fountain, had provided enough items to fill up most of day-after-to-morrow's printable chore. There was juice in them, too, provided one

knew how to apply the proper twist. Banker Taylor had applied for an RFC loan. The Scotts, long rumoured coolish, had taken a trip to St. Louis together. Arthur Langtry had won fifty dollars in a poker game. There had been a bad accident last night—six college kids joy-riding after the cotillion. Nobody knew their names and injuries yet, but by this afternoon either the barber or soda jerker (who dated the telephone girl at Westwood) would have the gory details.

These two were Jessie's most useful routine informants. Their occupations exposed them to a considerable amount of small gossip, which they were expected by their regular customers to pass along. The juiciest bits they held back for Jessie, and were rewarded by intangibles which that young man knew how to handle expertly; occasional mention of their names, for instance, in connection with some party, or, in the case of the barber, mention of his shop. Jessie had sold them the idea that they were his collaborators—something vague but flattering, involving the feeling that they were secret powers behind the glory of the printed word. They were especially valuable when all the columnist had was a skeleton piece of information which needed to be filled out with the kind of details either Curly, the barber, or Alec, behind his fountain, could pump from the customers.

Mrs. Rhodes wasn't home, the maid told him. She had gone out unexpectedly but would be back any minute, she was sure, for her lunch. Would he wait?

Might as well. It was raw and slippery out, and Fanny's well-heated living-room and rich table would be more than balm to the spirit. Besides, she might know something about the accident, or she could call around and find out, maybe. If they were Darcey kids almost any house where there was somebody of their own age would know. He went in, took off his outer things, and settled down comfortably on Fanny's couch, to read *Esquire* and smoke.

A short time later Fanny hurried in. "Oh, Giddings!" she exclaimed. "I'm so glad you're here. The most terrible thing has happened to poor Mrs. Frazier! I do declare, Giddings, I thought that new doctor was so nice, and now he has to do this perfectly awful thing! And it seems it wasn't only him; Doctor Gordon was in on it, too. Whatever would they do such a thing for! It's too ugly for words!"

"Why, Fanny!" cooed Jessie soothingly, repressing his private exultation. "You mustn't get so upset."

"Ooh!" she sobbed. "Dear Giddings. You're so understanding. Do stay to lunch. I simply must tell somebody."

Over the sliced chicken and salad Mrs. Rhodes told all, while Jessie entered mentally his private notes and calculations.

"I've just come from Mrs. Frazier's, you know. I took her home, right after we saw Doctor Herbert. Giddings, I don't know what's gotten into those people out at Westwood, but do you know what they're doing? It's Tony's idea, I believe. They're giving every woman who comes to be looked after when she has her baby, a blood test! You know what I mean? The idea of subjecting decent women to even the suspicion that they might have a dreadful disease! According to what Betty Frazier said, they send the blood in, with the name and everything, to Public Health, and it's analyzed there. Why, it's liable to get mixed up with white trash and nigger blood and what not, and if it ever gets out that such a thing is on record publicly, why . . . I'm sure that's what happened to Mrs. Frazier's and she is too, of course; but they told her at Westwood that they had sent two specimens and that it was all controlled and I don't know what all. Naturally, they had to say everything they could to keep themselves in the right, you know.

"So we went right over to Doctor Herbert's. Betty was sure that if there was the slightest possibility of anything wrong he would know it—he's their regular doctor. It was just that Betty had decided she wanted to have her baby out at Westwood, it's so much more convenient and restful than being at home, that's why she went out there. The first thing they did, that was two weeks ago, they examined her without a stitch of clothes on, just a muslin blouse of some kind, and they took this blood for the test. It's really immoral, Giddings! Treating private patients as if they were charity cases and all! I never heard anything like it in all my life before!

"Yes, Doctor Herbert saw Betty right away. I went right in with her, poor Betty was so upset, she had come straight to me from the hospital, crying like a baby. She made them give her the report and all. When Herbert looked at it he just smiled. 'My dear Mrs. Frazier,' he said, 'I would as soon suspect Doctor Gordon of having—er—syphilis as imagine you with it!'

"Then he gave her a sedative—the poor dear. According to Doctor Herbert, she was just run down. Anæmia, you know, and going to have a baby. He said for her to come in once a week and get some injections to build her up. And he inquired so nicely about Kenneth, Betty's husband, you know. Betty told him Kenneth hadn't been feeling so well lately, either. And Doctor Herbert suggested he might as well come in for a thorough checkup."

At this, Jessie permitted himself a small, sardonic smile. His private dossier on Kenneth was both extensive and lurid.

"But Fanny," he interpolated suavely, "it's not only Mrs.

Frazier. There must be other respectable women who have been humiliated in this way."

"Just what I told Betty! The Women's Club ought to take it up. And the very next meeting I'm going to . . . Giddings, you won't put anything in the paper, will you? I mean, not about Mrs. Frazier. I don't care about the rest of it. Yes . . . maybe it would be a good thing if the whole town knew what they were up to out there. But you will keep Betty's name out of it, won't you, dear?"

Jessie pledged his word of honour to keep Mrs. Frazier's name out of it.

"Westwood, good afternoon . . . Doctor McNeill? I'm sorry, he can't be called. I'm sorry, but he was up all night operating and he has just now gone to rest. Who shall I say called? Mrs. Rhodes? All right, Mrs. Rhodes, I'll let him know as soon as he wakes up.

"Westwood, good afternoon . . . I'm sorry, Doctor McNeill can't be called. Who wants him, please? Doctor Herbert? I'll tell him you called, Doctor Herbert. No, I'm sorry, Doctor Gordon can't be called either. I'm sorry, Doctor Herbert. I'll let them know you called.

"Westwood . . . Doctor McNeill? I'm sorry . . . Yes, Mrs. Leigh, I'll give him the message.

"Westwood, good afternoon . . . Yes, Mrs. Flannery, I'll put him on the line.

"Westwood, good aft . . . oh, hallo, Alec! What's new? Where was I last night? What do you care? . . . Oh, yeah? Says you . . . To-night? Wait a minute—

"Westwood, good afternoon! I'm sorry, Doctor McNeill can't be called, he was up all night operating . . . Doctor Gordon can't be called either. Who shall I say called? Mr. Frazier? All right.

"Alec? To-night's the New Year's, you poor sap! . . . I told you I'd go out with you? Since when? . . . Oh, cave-man stuff, huh? Well, you don't think much of yourself, do you? . . . Last night? Wait a minute—

"Westwood! I'm sorry, Doctor Herbert, I just can't call either Doctor Gordon or Doctor McNeil! Would you like to talk to Doctor Flannery? . . . All right then, I'll tell them you called."

"Alec? . . . Yeah, six college kids in a big closed car . . . Yeah, one of them was killed . . . Wait a minute, I'll see if I can find out.

"Westwood! Doctor Garms? Yes, Doctor Garms? I'm sorry Doctor McNeill can't be called. I'll let him know . . .

"Alec? . . . Naw, they weren't Darcey kids. They'd been at the dance, sure. Friends of somebody's . . . I don't believe I could get you the names, somebody might think I was nosy. The paper'll have them in the morning. Why are you so interested, anyhow? . . . Oh, I see. Oh, Oh,

if that's all . . . Yeah, all right. Nine o'clock . . . 'By. See you when you're sober !"

Tony was still groggy when he woke up at five o'clock. His throat was raw from ether, and his back and shoulders ached. He must have been in the operating-room for five hours, in addition to the deliveries. Lord, it was like being an interne again, working for thirty hours at a stretch. Nothing to some of the sessions he and Breaker had been through at Boone, but still . . .

A warm shower and a shave made him feel a little better. Then he went down to the diet kitchen to get himself some tea—good, black English tea—brewed. He sat there sipping it while Esther chattered to him about one thing and another, and he answered her in whispered monosyllables. Then he went upstairs to get whatever messages might have come in.

He met Flannery, who was just going home, in the hall.

"Going to the dance to-night, Tony ?"

"Have to, I guess. But I'd certainly much rather get some sleep."

"It'll do you more good than sleep, at your age. Besides, you've been sticking around all through the holidays, and after last night you need to get out and breathe some different air. What time are you picking your girl up ?"

"Around ten, I guess. It'll give me time to make rounds before I go."

"Make rounds earlier, why don't you, and join us for some drinks ?"

"Thanks, Tom ; maybe I will."

The messages Miss Hall gave him puzzled him a little. Mrs. Rhodes, Mrs. Leigh . . . What could they want ? If they were ill, they would have called Gordon. Frazier . . . Nasty business that. Gordon had better talk to him. There was one patient lost to Westwood ; but, after all who could imagine that a woman of her class and supposed education would behave as she had done ? A positive Wassermann was no slight thing ; but, ye gods, it wasn't his fault. And to get so sore because they'd taken the test at all. It was too incredibly stupid. Well. He'd make these phone calls later. Garms too. Better get down to the barber-shop before dark. It would be crowded, and he wanted to get back quickly.

On his way downtown, several people asked him about the accident, and one or two about the Truman baby. Was it true she had a harelip ? She was a lovely, healthy specimen, he assured them politely, realizing angrily that someone at Westwood had been talking. Another sour note. Coming on top of the Frazier thing, this small-town stuff left a pretty bad taste in his mouth. Oh, well ! At Boone, it would be something else ; and in the city, something

else again. Wherever you went, there was bound to be a lot of drabness and unpleasantness. A doctor dealt with sick and twisted people, after all. His thoughts, his conversation became too coloured with the physical. The unpleasant physical.

The barber-shop was already full by the time Tony got there. Several men, one or two of whom he knew slightly, were waiting. Jessie, the newspaper chap, was leaning on the cash register talking to Curly, head barber and owner of the place, as he worked. Did Tony really hear one of them mention the name Truman, or was he getting hysterical on the subject? Next thing you know he'd be having hallucinations, too.

"Evening, Doc," Curly greeting him.

"Good Evening, Curly. Do you suppose I could get a quick shave and trim? Sorry I couldn't get in earlier."

"Oh, sure, Doc. It'll only take about five minutes or so. I'm sure nobody here would mind if I took you out of turn, just this once. A doctor ain't like other people. Everybody understands how it is. I'll be right with you, Doc—just about through here. What's the trouble? Got a cold, Doc?"

"No, just too much ether. Thanks, Curly." Tony hung up his hat and coat, and walked over to the chair that was being vacated. He was already under lather when Jessie turned in his direction and, pitching his voice high and loud for the benefit of all the patrons in the shop, said, elaborately:

"Oh, Doctor McNeill! Please let me congratulate you! Westwood..."

Tony sat up, his face half-covered with soap, and said brusquely: "Westwood is none of your business, Mr. Jessie!" and carefully put his head back for Curly to finish the shaving job.

"Please, Doctor! I just wanted to tell you how thrilled I was to hear that Westwood is becoming such a scientific centre, and all your idea, too, I hear. Blood tests of all the women, sent to the Board of Health and everything. Darcey ought to be proud that such fine work is going on here. Of course, some of our dear ladies are so old-fashioned, you know, they might misunderstand Doctor. I do hope they won't, for your sake. Darcey is a little backward, you know, and awfully straight-laced. Why, I doubt if they'll even let me put the word syphilis in the paper—"

Tony jerked up, nearly getting himself cut. He turned squarely around and said to the barber, loudly: "Curly, if a man can't come in here and get his hair cut without being yapped at by any chattering fool who feels like it, I'll have to go elsewhere, I'm afraid. As for you, Jessie, mind

your own business—whatever it is, and keep out of Westwood. Understand?"

"Your word is law, m'lord!" cackled Jessie. "Ippity-uppity up!" and went out, slamming the door. Somebody tittered snuffly, and then there was silence. Clip-clip, clip-clip, Curly's assistant continued methodically to reduce the already sparse thatch of a patron whom Tony recognized as the president of the local Rotary Club.

"Curly," said Tony in a voice kept carefully steady as the barber began on his trim, "can you tell me why Darcey hasn't passed an ordinance against that nuisance?"

"Oh, I dunno," said Curly slowly. "Jessie's not so bad."

He dropped the words like stones into the silence, and the silence closed over them. For the first time since his arrival in Darcey, Tony felt a chill of hostility, almost of menace, against him. Little as he knew about the inner workings of the town and the things Flannery had called "taboos," he realized that he had trespassed on forbidden ground—and was now being punished with something very close to ostracism. Perhaps this was only the beginning, too. Judging by their attitudes, Jessie had done a job here. A little more and he might have set them off like a pack in full cry. It was monstrous, absurd, unbelievable; it was something out of the Dark Ages . . . but nevertheless, here it was.

Nobody spoke to him when he got up and put on his coat and hat. Nobody answered when, after paying the barber he said a good-night loud enough to be general. But he heard the excited clatter begin the minute he closed the door behind him.

It was freezing cold, and he was almost unbearably tired. He hailed a cab. "Westwood," he said. And then in a few seconds feeling as if there actually were a mob behind him, he barked out: "Step on it!" And thought how unreasonable this was, even while he was doing it. McNeill isn't pleasing anybody tonight, still another part of his mind commented. Pretty soon the jangle in his head would break out into loud voices, like Babel itself. Or like—what was the city the Lord had condemned because there were not ten just men in it? Darcey, said he to himself, crazily.

He went to find Gordon as soon as he reached the hospital. He was sitting at his desk, drawing goggle-eyed monsters on his pad, and looked worried. The hue and cry had already reached him, it would seem. "A number of people have been calling up," he said, talking just above a whisper. (*Oh, so that's what those calls were. His throat must be even worse than mine.*) "It seems Mrs. Frazier started it. Then apparently Jessie has seen to it that the news got around fast."

"But why should Jessie go out of his way to make trouble

for Westwood, sir? And aren't there laws to cover malicious mischief of that sort?"

"Jessie would go out of his way to make trouble for anybody, especially Westwood, Tony. But somehow I have the feeling that there's more to this than just that little—carrier. Too bad Public Health has no jurisdiction over his type of pestilence. God knows it's at least as dangerous as typhoid."

"It wouldn't do any good to smack him, I suppose."

"Nothing less than drowning would fix Jessie, Tony. And since we can't even quarantine him, I think there's nothing to do but to lie low, keep our eyes open, and our minds on something else."

"I . . . I'm awfully sorry, you know. In a way, it's my fault."

"Don't worry about it, Tony. Westwood has gone through worse, and kept right on growing. We should have expected something of the kind, I suppose. At least, I should have realized it might hit them like that. Oh, well. No use letting it loom too large. It will blow over with time."

"I'm to go on taking the Wassermanns just the same?"

"Naturally!" snapped Gordon. "Do you think I'm going to let a lot of ignorant, hysterical gossip affect the way I run Westwood? Why . . . The dear ladies can yap their heads off! It's still a free country, God damn it, and I'm still boss here, at least!"

"Yes, sir. Don't you think I'd better stay in tonight? The roads are pretty slippery—there may be another wreck."

"No, go ahead; relax. There's nothing more we can do for those kids upstairs except the good post care they're getting, and there's no use your staying in just in case. I'll be here, anyhow. And if anything new comes up we can always call you at the club."

"I'd just as soon stay, you know."

"I'd just as soon you wouldn't. It's no use piling it on and then going stale. Go on to the dance. I'm going to read a while and then go to bed."

"Good-night, Chief."

"Good-night. Enjoy yourself. And tell Jessie . . ." Gordon finished in lurid, anatomical detail.

Tony got his dinner and then made rounds. The amputation—a girl whose left hand had been ground to bits under the car—was in pain, but the wounds was clean and her temperature was staying down. The fracture—one of the boys—was asleep. The third boy, whose head and face were entirely bound up, was just lying there. Tony had stood for two hours last night—until his shoulders were stripped with ribbons of flame—and picked glass out of his face. He had been a good-looking lad, his cheeks round from the last traces of childhood. The windows of the new

car had been of non-shatterable glass; but the whisky bottle which this boy was holding to his lips when the car struck was not so modern. If each splinter that Tony had removed left only a slight scar, the boy's face would be badly disfigured.

Tony gave him a sedative and took a look at the other three. They were all quiet, temperatures okay, everything ship-shape. Thank God for sulphanilamide. It took from your mind the worst load of post-operative worry in these accident cases. He could remember when about all you could do against the possibility of gas bacillus . . . strep . . . was pray . . .

The babies were all right too. Tony had spent several hours in the overheated delivery room with the first one, a high-forceps case. The mother had been swell, apologized for making so much trouble, and helped all she could. Funny the way some women were, brave and sweet like that, and others raised hell over nothing. You could never tell which would be which, either, until hard labour came on. They wore their masks and their little airs right up to that point; and then they were stripped clean of nonsense—call it civilization, maybe—and were just animals, some nobler, some more vicious, than when they had their make-ups on.

He went to wash in the sterilizing-room. Miss Ward followed him in for instructions. From the look on her face he knew that she thought he was plenty grouchy and expected trouble. Well, she had it coming to her!

He went carefully through the list of who was to have sedatives, when and how much, and the rest of the routine; initialed the orders, and then:

"Miss Ward, Mrs. Truman hasn't seen her baby yet, has she?"

"No, Doctor. You said . . ."

"I know what I said. But what I want to find out is if you know it. I thought it was understood that no one was to see the child or hear in any way of its deformity? That Mr. Truman especially requested this?"

"Yes, Doctor."

"He'd scarcely spread the news himself, do you think?"

"No, Doctor."

"I was up town a short while ago. Four different people asked me about the Truman baby—they all knew she had a harelip."

"I don't understand how it could have gotten out, Doctor McNeill."

Tony finished washing his hands, and dried them carefully. "It's your job as supervisor to understand these things, Miss Ward. Quite plainly somebody in Westwood likes to talk. It's your job to see that such people aren't in any position to do any harm. Or not have them on the

place at all! If you can't do that, your job is too big for you."

"Oh, Doctor . . ." Her eyes were filled with tears and her cheeks were blazing. "I'm so sorry. I shall try to see where the trouble started right away."

"Our patients have a right to expect the most complete privacy, and to get it. I don't want a repetition of this thing, Miss Ward. That's all."

Listlessly, Tony went through the motions of bathing and dressing. His muscles ached, his head throbbed, his mind jangled with confusion. For twenty years, ever since he had used to sit holding the reins of his father's horse while the latter paid a visit to some isolated farm family, Tony had never questioned the worth and desirability of being a doctor; nor had he ever once faltered in his own dedication to that profession. Money? Name? Social status? Such things were incidental by-products, secondary results of the physician's laborious devotion. His brothers had jeered at him; his mother had taunted him delicately, trying to make him consider the pecuniary advantages of other occupations. It had all been merely noise to him. Life had been austere simple as he conceived it: a matter of his relationships to his patients and to his professional associates. If he poured all his brains and skill into his work and kept those relationships clean, how could life become complicated?

He had been in Darcey eight months, in practice for the first time in his life, and already he was knee-deep in complications that had nothing to do with medicine, strictly speaking, and yet promised to affect his medical career crucially.

Fragments of Tom Flannery's talk kept recurring to him: "Some of our best people . . . Try to do anything and you're ostracized. They can wreck any man pretty quickly, especially a doctor, whose capital is public opinion. Cypress Flats . . . just a symptom of the general pathology of the town—snobbery and ignorance pyramided on dreariness, misery, and despair."

Tom had been a little drunk, probably, when he had said all that. And again when, at the country club, he had declaimed between drinks: "The trouble with Darcey is that it hasn't made up its mind whether to live or die."

But who could have expected to have all that become real, become suddenly terrifying facts, just because he had taken routine Wassermanns in the obstetric department, and had happened to find syphilis in the veins of one of the town's elite? Wassermanns, putting the law on that old abortionist, these things representing cleanliness, social hygiene, were the doctor's business as much as one sick patient could be. Hadn't Darcey ever heard of preventive medicine? Didn't they know that a communicable disease

had to be handled as a community problem? If Mrs. Frazier had had leprosy would they be willing to let her walk around freely, concealing her pestilence if she could and spreading suffering and death? Would they? Well, what about tuberculosis? They let that walk around pretty freely, and God knows it could be more dangerous than leprosy.

What Tony had done was elementary, and unarguably right. By all standards imaginable it was right, because it contributed to more life and better life. Yet for him it had yielded hostility, suspicion, ostracism; possibly it might even become persecution. At the very least, it would be a seven days' scandal that would spread and spread, doing the hospital a great deal more harm than he personally could ever balance. At most . . . well, what looked like good work well begun, and life travelling cleanly down a vigorous path, would be cut into and tangled. Things like this had a way of becoming a vague association, something like an unpleasant smell, that hung about a doctor's name for ever after . . . having incalculable effects . . .

Oh, Lord. Maybe he was just tired and jittery and was probably exaggerating the whole business. Well, but Gordon wouldn't; and Gordon was worried. And if Gordon was worried, it must be plenty bad. He knew the town and could take the measure of a thing like this much more accurately than Tony. What would happen? Sermons? Publicity? Women's clubs drawing up resolutions and sending delegations? He had only the vaguest idea of the forms that social persecution customarily took in this day and age in such locales as Darcey. When you stopped to think of it, it was all pretty close to the things one had read about of how the Inquisition operated—persecuting scientists for demonstrating human anatomy, and such things as that. Fantastic.

Well, supposing it did get pretty bad. What about the other doctors? What would they do? They couldn't allow a member of the profession to be pilloried, and persecuted simply because he had done the clean, the necessary, the humane thing. They couldn't do that. As Tony's mind wandered from name to name, visualizing the faces, personalities, habits, characters of his colleagues, a cold, slow panic began to possess him. Herbert? Oh, Lord. Turner? Woods? Bonelli? Carey? Garms, yes. And one or two more, maybe, would know what was what, and behave like gentlemen and doctors. But the others? Could it be possible that the majority of the physicians of Darcey were themselves so petty, so trapped, so anxious for money, and so afraid of criticism that they would let him down in this and thereby betray the truest, deepest needs of the community? If so, then perhaps being doctor wasn't such a hell of a fine thing after all!

All the time he was dressing his turmoil grew, flattened down into a sense of discouragement and futility, flared in anger at the small minds and vicious motives evidently at work to create what by now must be known all over Darcey as the Frazier scandal. What with the remains of last night's backache, and his burning throat, he wasn't exactly primed for merrymaking. Well, at least, he wouldn't have Carolyn on his hands to-night. He could thank God for that much mercy. For that, and for the fact that there was no whoop-to-do in the hospital this time about his going to a party. The nurses were all too tired, and too busy—the way he ought to be.

What the hell kind of a doctor did he think he was, anyhow, lighting out to go prancing around on a dance floor, when what he should be doing was getting some rest, like Gordon, and assuring his steadiness for to-morrow's work? A doctor had no business with a social life, anyway. Ought to cut himself off from all those ties and obligations, like Gordon. What a model for any young medic he was! He never wasted so much as a minute. Kept well, did all his reading, stayed home, tended strictly to his own business, put everything he had into his profession. Everything! Jese, you had to, to make any kind of a dent in the job.

Tony had no business getting himself tied up in dates to go to dances, and what not. Gordon didn't. Besides, he'd have a lousy time. He'd probably have to cut through chunks of glacial atmosphere, like a damned Russian ice-breaker, or something. Why should he subject himself to being snubbed and humiliated, anyhow? And by such warts as these, whose fears and faults and weaknesses he knew even better than they did themselves, seeing the stories plainly written in their deformed bodies.

Nine-fifteen. He'd call Marietta.

"Fallo." The voice at the other end of the wire was ironically sweet but, as always, it had the effect of an electrical current on him.

"Oh! Oh, so just because I hadn't called, you decided I would be too busy and you called Ted Dameron? Well, just call him again and tell him it was a slight error. . . .

"No, I'm not tired. All right, you wait and see. No! I'll be there at ten, and if I find any other fellow there I'll . . . beat you. . . . I do mean it. Listen. Had you decided to break the date with me just because I hadn't called? Is that the only reason? . . . Are you sure? . . . Don't you think it was unfair of you? After all, I had a hard day. you have to consider one can't be spending time making unnecessary calls. . . .

"I'm not self-important and pompous! Am I, Marietta? Ah, ha! I'll see you at ten dear."

Half-past nine. Time for a drink or two at Tom's be-

fore he called for Marietta. Yes, a drink or two would help. He *was* tired. The hospital. Jessie. The Darcey gossip grapevine. And Marietta ready to substitute any pair of pants for him. It was all too much. Did a doctor rate as a human being or didn't he? One night a year, at least!

Chapter Eight

PAUSING on the hospital steps. Tony felt an unaccustomed sag of loneliness and dejection. The night was freezing clear, and the moon riding high and full, shed an almost clinical light on the nondescript town that chance had made his own, whose life was to be his life. Chance, too, he told himself, had been the architect of the untidy collection of houses and buildings yonder; the pretentious pathos of the middle-aged Victorian court-house, the half-dozen church spires that pricked the sky-line; finally the huddle of shacks across the railroad tracks, from which came the blare of the radio and the joyless thump of the player piano, as Darcey's New Year celebration got under way.

That clinical moon, and the cold wind blowing in from the prairie, accented Tony's mood and gave this rather typical American landscape a curious aspect of transitoriness. Darcey and all that it thought and did, he told himself, was a brief and next-to-meaningless episode in the long flow of time. Why should he sweat and worry about it, sacrifice himself for it?

Marietta, whom he would soon have in his arms, hated this town. Herself very much alive, she really didn't care whether Darcey lived or died. Well, maybe Marietta had the right idea. Why should he work himself to the point of empty exhaustion, trying to carry the whole of Darcey on his shoulders? It wasn't in the contract. It wasn't the physician's job. To hell with it, then. Marietta was right. . . . Beautiful, too, he added to himself. The thought of her warm loveliness eased his fatigue, and he quickened his pace as he turned the corner into Trask Avenue. He was still early, however, and Marietta would only scold him if he showed up too soon. Tom Flannery had meant his suggestion that Tony drop in for a drink before the dance. Fine. He hadn't had a decent spree since the last beer party at Boone.

Judith met him at the door. He kissed her vigorously and cheers rang out from the living-room.

"Why, Tony!" Judith's face exhibited concern as well

as surprise. "Tom, what's happened to our Galahad? Are you sure you need a drink, Tony?"

"Yes, and make it a stiff one," replied Tony. "In fact, I'll need a half-dozen before I get the ether out of my throat and feel half-human Thanks."

Tony emptied the tall scotch and soda much as if he were decanting a test tube, and promptly demanded another. After the second drink, a gradual glow eased both the ache of his back and the accumulated tensions of his mind. Great fellow, Tom Flannery. Judith—fine woman, good scout. Nice people. Gravely he addressed the young lady who approached bearing a tray of anchovy sandwiches.

"I haven't met you," he declared formally. "My great misfortune. Thank you. I'm a doctor. Wouldn't interest you. Not quite human. See—like this anchovy. No flavour in itself. Gets everything from the caper. The caper is my profession. See? Deep stuff, and quite untrue. Quite. About the anchovy, I mean. Thank you, Miss—"

"Lydia is the name," said the lady. "I think you're sweet." Impudently she leaned over and kissed him on the forehead.

"Thank you, Lydia. Do you know Marietta? I'm taking her to the dance. If you were I. Lydia, what would you do about Marietta?"

Lydia, her face lively with malice, leaned over and whispered something in his ear.

Tony nodded solemnly. "I've thought of that. It might work—if only I weren't a doctor. . . . Well, so long, Lydia. Got to see a patient. Professional duty. 'By, Tom. 'By, Judith.. See you later."

Tony's memory of the next few hours was never very clear. Marietta, angry at first at his delay in calling for her, ended by being amused at Tony in his unaccustomed role of the slightly tipsy celebrant. Especially since, on the whole, Tony played the part rather charmingly. True, there were a few unfortunate episodes, which Tom Flannery, himself almost completely sober for once, was not agile enough to prevent.

For example, there was Tony's encounter with Banker Taylor, later to become a classic anecdote among Darcey's Younger Married Set.

Left stranded on the side lines when one of Marietta's innumerable boy friends cut in on them, Tony dropped into a seat next to Darcey's leading banker.

"Oh, Mr. Taylor." Tony bowed elaborately. Then with the exaggerated solicitude which characterized his behaviour throughout the evening:

"Feeling out of sorts, Mr. Taylor? Those madmen in

Washington getting under your skin? Permit me." Firmly seizing Mr. Taylor by the arm, Tony marched him to the bar. Morally as well as medically, you're quite right. Quite. Make mine a rye highball, Lydia." The black boy at the bar stared at him, and grinned. "Thank you. Now, Mr. Taylor, a little matter of business. You don't mind?"

Mr. Taylor glared. He minded intensely. But rather than make a scene he permitted himself to be conducted back to his chair, while Tony presented his "business proposition." It had to do, it appeared, with the possibility of financing a new industry in Darcey. To be precise, the guinea-pig industry.

"Wonderful animals, guinea pigs," declaimed Tony earnestly, to the delight of a growing audience. "You ought to know them better, Mr. Taylor. Home bodies. Crazy about family life. Minimum investment required. Start with two guinea pigs, see? Male and female. Feed them well. Treat them kindly. Leave the radio on—swing stuff, romantic ballads, you know. Gives them ideas. Gives anybody ideas. . . . No, no. Mr. Taylor—nothing personal. Just one minute, Mr. Taylor. Darcey needs new industries, new investment. Right? Now, as I was saying. . . ."

Summoned by repeated bursts of hilarity, Tom Flannery arrived at the scene just as Tony was concluding an elaborate geometric computation.

"You'll be surprised, Mr. Taylor. Once they get the idea, those guinea pigs! Why, the sky's the limit! This is just a rough estimate, Mr. Taylor. One million, six hundred and forty-four thousand guinea pigs the first year! The first year, Mr. Taylor! Am I right, Tom?"

It was clear to Flannery that the situation was getting out of hand. Frantically, he signalled Marietta, who was dancing with Ted Dameron. Then, to Tony:

"Right as a trivet, Tony. But you're forgetting your social duties. Do you realize you had this dance with Marietta?"

Tony turned to him reproachfully. "Tom, you're a frivolous character." Confidentially, to Mr. Taylor, "Good fellow, Flannery. Swell doc, but you know—no interest in business. No head for it. Will you excuse me, Mr. Taylor? Thank you. See you later. Maybe little holding company—just you and me. . . . All right, Tom, if you insist. Pleasure before business."

With Tony safely in the arms of Marietta, Flannery mopped his brow and hastened to consult his wife.

"My God, Judith. What'll we do? I swear, I believe this is the first time in his life the kid's had more than two drinks in a row. And now look at him!"

At the end of the dance floor, Marietta and Tony were

rendering a more than adequate version of the terpsichorean exercise known as "trucking."

"He seems to be doing all right, Tom. How about letting nature take its course?"

"What? And have the whole town. . . . There's hell to pay already, you know. . . . Oh, all right. Then it's my turn for a drink. I need one."

"I love you, Marietta," murmured Tony as the music changed to waltz time, and Marietta's silky hair blew against his cheek.

"Yes, Tony. I heard you the first time."

Marietta, gowned in a French-looking model of black velvet that bared her white back to the waist, was flagrantly beautiful and superbly confident. Indeed, the women and girls on the dance floor fell into only two categories: the others, and Marietta. This had been equally true at the Christmas ball when she had used her power deliberately and maliciously to humiliate the unfortunate Carolyn. But to-night she was curiously sober and her sexual warmth, though graciously given to one partner after another, had none the less sheathed its provocative edge.

"You're beautiful, Marietta. Nothing else matters. Did I make a fool of myself with that idiotic banker?"

"Yes, Tony."

"Do you mind?"

"No, Tony. It was fun, wasn't it?"

"Tom was worried."

Marietta's lip curled. "Tom would be. Tom's careful, you know. Awfully careful."

"Marietta!"

"Yes, Tony."

"I hate this damned town. . . . I don't mean that. . . . I've been drinking, Marietta. I mean I'm—I'm afraid of it."

Marietta disengaged herself momentarily to look at her partner. What she saw was a face almost pathetically young in its outlines, yet sagging with a fatigue and distress which the alcoholic stimulation could no longer conceal.

"I'm tired, Marietta."

"Yes, Tony. I'm taking you home. Soon."

They danced cheek to cheek for two more dances, Marietta curtly rejecting all attempts to cut in. Then she got her wraps. Their departure, it occurred vaguely to Tony, was almost elaborately ignored. He commented on this in the taxi.

"Yes," said Marietta. "Darcey has learned its manners about me. It had better."

His head in Marietta's lap, Tony felt his weariness dissolve in a mysteriously unfolding peace.

"Marietta," he murmured.

"Yes, Tony."

"You . . . Do you? I don't want . . . If you're just being kind . . ."

Marietta leaned over, crushed his head against her perfumed breast, and kissed him.

At the door, Tony found himself trembling almost helplessly.

Brusquely, Marietta fitted the key in the lock and led him into the living-room. Embers still glowed in the fireplace. The clock in the hall struck three.

"Bobby's in bed, I guess," said Marietta, adjusting her hair and make-up before the mirror. "Here's her coat."

"Marietta!"

"I want you terribly."

Marietta faced him, smiling. It was as if her femaleness, held in leash all evening, was now suddenly released.

"Marietta!"

"Yes, Tony. There, that's better, isn't it? Oh, Tony. Sweet. Sweet. . . ."

It was five o'clock in the morning and Darcey, silent beneath a fading moon, seemed utterly deserted when Tony emerged from the Doyles' front door and, at a pace just short of a run, strode up the avenue.

In Mrs. Rhodes's house next door, the front door softly closed. Jessie, in the shadows of the porch, smiled to himself. An all-night job, but worth it. Still grinning, he followed Tony's wake down the empty street.

Tony got into the hospital, into his room, without meeting so much as the night nurse. He tossed his hat on the bureau, hung his coat over a chair back—crookedly. He sat on the other chair and reached languidly for his shoe. If the string were really tied in a knot, he'd burst into loud and piercing screams. He put his foot to the floor again, and sat there, his hands hanging loosely between his knees. He had a hangover, right enough. And not just from being silly-drunk, either. He'd never felt more sunk in his life. Dirty, mussed, gritty. Empty of body and spirit.

Joy. That's what novelists called the thing. But—something must be wrong. With him? With Marietta? This thing, if he weren't a sap, and Marietta a . . . well, she wasn't that. But anyway, this thing should have certain elements of beauty, and of manly pride. But the whole thing was exactly like the flat, furry taste of his tongue. Ah, he was still drunk. In the crying-jag stage.

The alarum clock rang at nine. It beat on the walls of Tony's dreamless slumber; stopped briefly, and beat again. Gradually, Tony groped his way back to consciousness—the drumming alarum clock, the monastic walls of his

small room; outside, the glare of brilliant sunlight on the snowy lawn.

Automatically, Tony stumbled to the shower and began his morning ablutions. Halfway through his shave, he found himself singing full-throatedly the irrelevant nonsense of the latest popular ballad—and stopped in surprise.

He felt fine this morning, he suddenly realized. No remorse. No soul searchings. Above all, not tired, although he had every reason to be. Lord, he reflected, is it possible that human beings are like that? Drunk, yes, he had been a little drunk last night. And Marietta? Well, he had been a human being for once in his life, and he wasn't sorry. Sorry? It was wonderful! Damned if he was worried. Galahad? He grinned ruefully. Hell with it. Maybe he, Tony McNeill, was a pretty low character after all. Well, so what? He had work to do. Yes, work to do. There came back to him with a rush the worries of the day before. Jessie. Mrs. Frazier. Mattie Jordan. Damn their eyes! Well they wouldn't get away with it. He'd see it through if it took him all winter, and all spring. What, stop a physician in the exercise of his elementary responsibility? Let them try. Damn their eyes! Let them try.

Promptly at nine-thirty, Tony strode into the ward and startled the nurses with a display of severity, almost Gordon-like in its brisk ruthlessness. Didn't they know the regular Saturday-morning clinic was scheduled for ten? Well, how about a little pep? Where were those charts? How did they expect to learn anything if they didn't keep decent records?

One or two of the nurses smiled secretly, but they jumped to attention just the same. They liked him on the whole, even in his occasional unconscious imitations of the chief.

The first case showed every clinical sign of t.b.: a frail, hollow-chested, inarticulate farmer from the prairie hinterland. It took endless patience to get answers to questions from him, endless persuasion before X-rays were made. Rightly, he was Flannery's patient, but Tom had his hands full with a woman who had attempted suicide the night before. Gordon was making rounds on the surgicals. It was almost noon before Tony finished.

"All right, Sam. I think that's all for now, except the sputum."

"What say, Doc?" A hundred times that morning, Tony had met that phrase.

There was a row of bottles on the table across the room. "I want you to spit into three of those bottles." Sam fumbled at his suspenders. Looked at his shoes—

heavy boots that had left round nailprints on the linoleum. Looked at the bottles doubtfully.

"What's the trouble?"

"Well, Doc, I don't know as I kin—spit that far."

Miss Riley dived out of the door, giggling. Tony turned quickly, straightened his face, got the bottles. Miss Dulaney came in.

"Doctor, could you come?"

"In a minute. What is it?"

"A woman—out in the waiting room—she seems pretty sick——"

"Doctor Gordon is upstairs."

"I believe you'd be better."

Tony looked at the nurse, surprised. He got up. "All right, Sam. Miss Riley will take those bottles."

He followed Miss Dulaney to the first-floor reception room. A pale young woman was sitting in one of the chairs. Pretty sick was right—she was barely able to walk into the examining room.

Tony shot a questioning glance at the nurse, who nodded significantly.

"When did this happen?"

The girl's face was pinched and papery white. She spoke almost inaudibly.

"Doctor, I—I was going to have a baby."

"Yes, and . . ."

Tears sprang to the girl's eyes. "I—I couldn't—Doctor. I—I'm not married."

Another one. More to himself than to her, Tony muttered:

"Mattie Jordan."

The girl hesitated, then nodded dumbly.

"I thought I'd be all right afterward. But——" Under Tony's direction, the nurse was stripping off the cheap coat and flimsy cotton dress.

"I haven't any money, Doctor. It took everything I had——"

"I know. Quiet, please."

Tony took the thermometer from her mouth and his eyebrows shot up involuntarily. A quick examination was enough to convince Tony that his first guess had been right. The girl was bleeding badly. There was perhaps a fifty-fifty chance to save her—no more.

"Put her to bed in the ward, nurse. I'll get Gordon." Then to the patient:

"What's your name?"

"Mary Simla."

"You're going to have a little operation, Mary. You've been badly treated and I want you to tell the nurse about it."

"But, Doctor——"

Tony hated to do it, but he might not get another chance. If this girl would sign an affidavit . . .

"We'll do everything we can for you, Mary, and it won't cost you a cent. But you've got to help us, too. That old hag . . ."

The girl shuddered. "We can't afford to——"

"All right."

Within fifteen minutes she was signing a short transcript Miss Hall had made of her story. Meanwhile Tony had seen Gordon.

"I'm getting her signed story. Told her Westwood would take care of her free for it. Okay? She's our witness if I can save her life."

"May I help?"

Let him be sarcastic; it was better than the mixed tears and fury, all tangled up with elation, boiling inside Tony. Gordon had already rung for Miss Ward. By the time he examined the patient, the operating room girls were already busy preparing.

They worked quickly. Gordon trusted Tony's diagnoses. Every time there was evidence of that, a warm sense of accomplishment rushed through Tony. The two of them operated team-fashion, like a rhythmic machine. Click-click, click-click—above the breathing, the synchronized sounds of the instruments taken and removed by the four hands. Mary couldn't have bought better surgery than this anywhere, at any price. It would take days of the most careful attention to save her life. She had no reserve strength, was anæmic, had suffered horrible pain and shock. Click-click, click-click, it was over in twenty minutes. So far, so good, and cross your fingers, Tony McNeill. This is *your* case. This is the girl who is going to be the witness, the direct witness the courts seem to require. Careful, Miss Ward. Careful girls. Mary Simla has to get the very best care, every detail has to be watched, she's *got* to come through.

In the hall, Tony met Flannery, who had just completed his tour of the ward.

"Another Jordan case!" Tony exclaimed exultantly. "I've got her to sign a statement. That ought to clinch it. don't you think?"

Flannery pursed his lips, considered, and said:

"Come into the office a moment, Tony."

Tony followed, somewhat puzzled.

"Look, Tony," began Flannery. "I don't want you to misunderstand me. Getting rid of that Jordan hag is a swell idea; you've got your nerve with you and I admire you for it. But—oh, well, do you realize that, as things stand, the abortion business is one of Darcey's essential industries? It's the same here as it is everywhere else in the United States. Somewhere between a million and a

million and a half a year I believe the total runs. Figure an average of fifty dollars apiece—that's low, of course; even Mattie probably gets more sometimes—and it stacks up to a handsome sum for the country at large. Moreover, Mattie is undoubtedly paying protection. The racket is organized here, just like any other business that has to operate outside the law."

"Organized? You mean——"

"Sure. Wait till you take that Simla affidavit to the District Attorney's office. If you don't get the old run-around, I miss my guess, assuming the Simla girl sticks to her story, which I personally doubt."

Tony was staggered. "Does that mean that you——"

"That I or Gordon will walk out on you when the going gets tough? Nuts. I'm glad you started it—so's Gordon. We'll stick, of course. But I'm warning you, it isn't going to be easy."

"I don't think you ought to, Mariettea."

It was Bobby speaking. Marietta rose from the crammed suitcase on which she was kneeling and glared at her sister.

"Ought to? Who says 'ought' to me?"

"But I thought you were gone on him."

"I thought so, too."

"Until—last night?"

Marietta nodded. "He's all right, Bobby. He's sweet, and decent as they come. But all the time I wasn't thinking of him at all. I was thinking of somebody else, and wishing . . . Then, this morning, that telegram." She jumped up, her face shining. "He's back, Bobby. Joe is back. He hasn't forgotten. He wants to see me, and I'm going. Now. I'll have a week before school starts. Oh, Bobby!"

"Wait a minute." Bobby extricated herself from her sister's frantic embrace. "Do you mean to tell me that all these years . . ."

"Of course. I didn't realize it myself until last night. I must have had a premonition that telegram was coming. Oh, tell me I'm a fool. Maybe I am. I don't care. I don't care."

Bobby considered. "So I'm to tell Tony that your first and only love has shown up again, and he's to please excuse it, and . . ."

"Just tell him I had a chance to go to California during the school vacation. Tell him—oh, tell him anything. There!" Marietta finally accomplished the closing of her suitcase. "That's the taxi. Kiss Mike for me—the poor dear. 'By!'"

It was nearing eight that evening before Tony could

consider himself off duty. Should he phone Marietta? He made a movement towards the telephone and checked himself. No, why not surprise her?

Carefully he removed the heavy old-fashioned ring from its leather case. Would she like it? His mother had said . . . Tony closed the case, put it in his pocket, and prepared to sally forth. At the desk, John Oliver regarded him with admiration.

"Out again to-night, Doctor? I should think you'd be dead for sleep."

"Never felt better in my life," declared Tony. It was true, he reflected as he strode up the street, dodging the thawing slush at the crosswalks, his blood warm with expectancy. A brief engagement—Marietta would have to say yes now—and then, maybe his life would begin to make sense. Mike and Mrs. Doyle would both approve the marriage, he was confident. And Marietta—give her a little responsibility and she'd change. Maybe a little hard-boiling was good for a woman.

He was tired, but he was aware of himself as a young tree must be when bursting into leaf. He could feel the blood course through his veins; he could feel each muscle stretch and contract as he walked. He had chosen to go the back way, and when a freight train held him at the crossing he swore aloud, slowly, deliberately, grinning at himself, choosing his words carefully. He jangled the coins in his pocket, his fingers conscious of the warmth of his thigh.

Money? Well, a hundred and fifty a month wasn't much. On the other hand, fifty dollars at one clip was quite a raise. It had meant more than money, too. It meant that Gordon was satisfied, intended to keep him on at Westwood. It meant that the stones of his life were being laid into a firm, steady foundation, on which he might build and live. And as for Jessie and those women's club biddies, let them try starting something. He'd been in a panic yesterday. But to-day, why should he worry? He was on solid ground medically. Gordon knew it. Flannery knew it. Eventually, the town would have to recognize it—and his own position would be stronger than ever.

He ran up the walk to the Doyles' porch. The house was dark. He could see the blur of a girl's light dress, coming to the door.

"Marietta!" he gasped.

"Tony?"

Darn his luck—it was Bobby. He went up the steps, slowly. "Is Marietta here?"

"Oh, Tony, I'm sorry——"

"What?" By God, if Marietta had *dared* to stand him up! She *must* have known he'd come that evening the moment he could.

"She's gone. Gone to Denver!" Barbara's high, thin voice tinkled in his ears like a persistent bell.

"Gone? Marietta? She's left Darcey?" He took out his handkerchief and wiped his face. He felt ill, as if he'd been struck in the belly.

"Oh, poor Tony. Didn't she tell you?"

"No."

"She had a chance to drive to Denver with the Elktons. She didn't know until this morning—my goodness, the house has been like a cyclone."

Tony leaned hard against the porch railing. He felt as if he might fall over it. He was glad the porch was dark—too dark for Bobby's bright curiosity to see his face. He hoped his voice wouldn't betray him. His hands were wet and clammy—he felt actually sick. "She might have told me," he cried, loudly and angrily.

"Yes, she should have. Tony. But you don't let people phone you at the hospital do you?"

That was true. Tony had made a blanket ruling.

"There were ways . . ." he said helplessly.

"Yes. But Marietta will write you, I'm sure."

A piece of dry paper, when he had wanted her warmth and fragrance. He shivered, and drew his coat around him. "Well," he said, with forced lightness, "I guess that's that. Good-night, Bobby. No. I won't stay."

Tony's impulse was to run. To tuck his tail between his legs and crawl off into some dark corner. His feet stumbled, fatigue dragged at his limbs. He hadn't realized how physically tired he really was. Without planning where he would go, he found that he had strayed from the sidewalk and down through the drifts into the hollow. He leaned against a big tree trunk, and contemplated the situation. It didn't get any better. In fact, the more he thought about it the madder he got. For Marietta to leave without a word after last night was like a slap in the face. He had heard of caddish men treating women that way, but that a decent woman—and Marietta was decent, despite her bawdy speech—it was unheard of. What did it mean? He'd not mistaken her fierce jealousy if he seemed to look at another girl, laughed with one. She'd objected whenever he'd spent an evening at Flannerys'. She'd sulked for a week when he accepted Mrs. Taylor's invitation to one of the Music League concerts. But now, without one word of explanation or regret . . . Perhaps she'd felt none. Women were horrible. A man was a fool to let a woman get to the place where she could hurt him so much. A man couldn't help himself. A man's brain, heart, and body needed a woman—for a man to lose his woman, suddenly, was like the amputation of a limb. The stump bled, and ached.

Above the rim of the hollow, the wind was rattling the limbs of the oak trees and occasionally sending a cold

draught down to stir the drifted snow. Tony suddenly realized that he was cold as well as wretchedly weary. He must get back to the hospital. Back to work. God, why couldn't he be like Gordon—really married to his profession and hence exempt from woman trouble?

As Tony emerged from the hollow and regained the sidewalk, a slight figure, clad in windbreaker, short skirt, and galoshes, looked back, uttered a startled exclamation and hurried on. It took him a moment to realize who it was. Carolyn Taylor, of course, on her regular evening walk. Was she cutting him, too? Damn it all, he'd see.

Overtaking her in a few quick strides, he seized her arm almost roughly.

"Good-evening, Miss Taylor. What's your hurry? Did you think I was a tramp?"

The girl gazed at him with an expression akin to fear.

"Don't be afraid. I'm not drunk."

"Oh, Tony."

Tony laughed, without merriment. "You've probably heard plenty about last night. You'd think nobody ever before got drunk in the whole history of Darcey. All right, you can have your rotten, hypocritical town. You and your——"

"Doctor McNeill!"

The girl's tone, sharp with hurt and anger, brought him up short.

"You haven't any right to talk to me like that. What have I ever done to you? What do I care whether you were drunk at the dance or not? You think I'm a silly little nitwit. Well, think so. . . . No, let me go."

The girl was crying now, her initial anger dissolved in misery. Good God, what had he done now? thought Tony helplessly.

"I'm sorry, Carolyn. I'm a brute. Please forgive me. You're headed my way. Can't I walk with you?" He took her arm and she submitted without resistance, falling in with his step as he continued his apologies.

"I've been worried to death, Carolyn. Trouble at Westwood. No sleep. . . ."

"I know."

"You know? What do you mean? Has this confounded gossip——"

"Tony, please!"

They stopped, and again Tony was taken aback by the sudden realization that he had never understood this girl. Slight, almost frail, there was colour under the pale skin and something like force in the eyes that compelled his respect.

"Of course, I've heard the gossip. My mother—Aunt Fanny—they want you to leave, Tony. They're—I tried to tell them they musn't but——" Again anger flushed her

cheeks, making her suddenly almost pretty. "Can't you understand? Just because my mother is—oh, why do you think I'm such a fool! Why am I talking to you! Galahad, they call you! You don't like me. Marietta—that's the kind of a girl you like. Let me go, I tell you!"

"Carolyn!" Tony called after her. There was no answer. Almost running, the slight figure steadily receded in the dusk of the deserted street.

Tony shook his head like a tired horse. He was weary enough, he reflected, to lie down right in the street. But no. Back to Westwood. He'd sleep now. A man could stand just so much.

Chapter Nine

THE THREE ladies were dressed so much alike that it was almost theatre, reflected Gordon, drawing cubist abstractions on his memorandum pad while he listened to their spokesman, Mrs. Taylor. And the affected "prunes and prisms" way in which she beat around the bush, avoiding the word *syphilis* and pursing her lips every time she mentioned Tony's name—it was all theatre too. Farce, almost. He'd heard some woman do an act along these lines over the radio. But Mrs. Taylor was even more of a burlesque on gentility than the voice on the air had been.

He wasn't listening very closely to what they were saying. They were outraged, they were insulted, nice women mustn't be subjected to such humiliation any more, and so on. He got the drift, but his mind was somewhere else—specifically, with Joe Milzner on the second floor, just coming out of the anaesthesia. Joe was a miner, brought in with a crushed leg. Setting it had been a nice job.

"Well?" Mrs. Taylor spoke sharply. She had finished her speech and had been waiting two minutes for an answer, while Gordon sat there drawing pictures.

"Eh? Oh, yes, Mrs. Taylor. Yes, indeed, Mrs. Leigh. Of course, Mrs. Edwards. You're quite right, it's most regrettable. I hope it won't happen again."

"Then you will stop making those tests on the nice women of Darcey, Doctor?"

"Eh? What tests? Are you trying to suggest medical procedures to Westwood, Mrs. Taylor?"

"Oh, no, Doctor, of course not. Only you see the Women's Club has been so disturbed to hear about the new system Doctor McNeill seems to be putting in and . . ."

"Doctor McNeill is my assistant, Mrs. Taylor. He has my full authority for whatever diagnostic procedures he has instituted, and moreover he is on unimpeachable

ground, medically. I hope you ladies will turn your attention to something . . . more in the social-service department, perhaps. I would suggest you look into the working and living conditions of the women in the Cypress Flats section, for instance. Thank you so much for your interest, Mrs. Taylor. Mrs. Leigh. Mrs. Edwards. Good-day to you."

"You are very arrogant, Doctor Gordon," said Mrs. Taylor, and bowed herself stiffly out. The others rustled after her.

"Well, she seems to have gotten the last word, anyhow," grinned Flannery, who had arrived just in time to hold the door open for them. "What did they want? Our semi-ambulatories wheeled to church every Sunday, or something?"

"Mostly, they seem to want Tony fired," said Gordon wryly. "I get an assistant first-rate beyond my wildest dreams, and lo and behold, the pack's in full cry after him. Reminds me of the days they were after my scalp," he grinned, but worriedly.

"What are you going to do? Have him crawl on his knees to the Frazier woman, or something?"

"What can I do? I told them, politely, to go to hell. As for Tony, there's no sense letting him know about it. He's upset enough as it is. We'll just furl our sails to the wind. Is this affair of his with the Doyle girl serious?"

"Violent. He'd marry her if she . . ."

"Oh, hell! That's a sure source of complications, then. Can you keep an eye on that, Tom? The way the town is feeling now, what with the Wassermann business and the Jordan affair—I hear they're scared stiff she'll talk if she's caught—they'll snatch at anything to drag Tony and all of us in the mud. We've been lucky every time they've tried it before, but there is such a thing as pushing things too far. I'd hate to see them get Westwood after all. . . . Tom? How powerful do you think Mattie's backers are?"

"Dunno, but plenty. But they're all afraid, beginning with the old hag herself. I think we'll manage."

"Yes, we'll manage. I don't enjoy these things as much as I did, though. I wish we could keep Westwood free of all that horror and dirt. We have enough to worry about right here."

"I know. Esculapian paradise in one hospital. It's a pipe dream, and you know it."

"Sure it is. I've made some of it come true, haven't I?"

"Yes. But we don't seem to have affected the Darcey health picture very materially."

"You want Utopia, Tom."

"No. I just want the possible things made possible. Just civilization, that's all."

Tom's luck at pitching pennies that evening left to Tony the duty of accompanying Gordon to the regular monthly meeting of the Darcey Medical Society, while Tom remained in charge at Westwood.

"You'll have a big time, Tony, consoled Tom. "There's to be a collation and everything. And besides, the little birds have been twittering about something very special coming up."

"Oh, quite. Beer and cheese sandwiches, and ads by Sister Kerbert," Tony complained.

"Tut-tut, my boy. Mustn't talk of the profession so disrespectfully. Suppose a layman heard you blaspheme like that? Dust off your dignity, now, and go help Gordon hold up the medical standards. 'By-'by, baby," and Tom folded himself still more comfortably into the depths of his office chair.

But Tony enjoyed the walk with Gordon through the frosty night air. Shoulder to shoulder legs in rhythm. they swung along without talking, contentedly in accord. For fifteen years, Westwood Hospital had presented a courteous, impregnable front to the rest of medical Darcey. Tony had long since become familiar with the petty politics, the small jealousies, the subtle tug-of-war that went on between the hospital and a large part of the local practitioners. Gordon was puritanically intolerant of the rackets, big and little, which some of the physicians carried on. Free spitting, unnecessary treatments, long series of dubious injections and, worst of all, avoidable or needless operations. Tony had seen by now a good many of the distressing and sometimes painful and even fatal, after-effects of these dishonest practices.

These things had shaken Tony profoundly. He had talked them out with Gordon and especially with Flannery, and in the process had been forced to re-examine his naive picture of the medical profession. He had come to realize that the Hippocratic Oath represented an ideal followed by only a few doctors. Such men were the exception among his colleagues. They were men willing to sacrifice financial ease and social show to . . . what was it? A set of principles? Humaneness? Or was it perhaps some consciousness of professional and personal integrity very much like that for whose sake so many poets, musicians, artists, scholars had starved in garrets?

That, in any case, was as nearly as Tony could define his own feelings, which he was now trying to analyze for the first time in his life. The pattern he wanted to follow had always been clear to him, in the person of his father. Nothing he had ever learned in medical school had even suggested the possibility that all doctors were not guided by the same principles as had guided his father, and which

he himself had always assumed to be as much a part of the medical profession as its cleanliness.

But the solemn law by which all doctors were supposed to live: "*I will follow the system of regimen which according to my ability and judgment I consider for the benefit of my patients, and abstain from whatever is deleterious and mischievous. I will give no deadly medicine to any one if asked nor suggest any such counsel; in like manner I will not give to a woman a pessary to produce abortion. With purity and with holiness I will pass my life and practise my art Whatever in connection with my professional practice or not in connection with it, I see or hear, in the life of men which ought not to be spoken of abroad, I will not divulge. . . .*"—this ancient

oath that the Greek doctors had administered to their disciples and which, centuries later, was being repeated by the graduates of medical schools—had become, for many of his colleagues, Tony realized, almost as archaic as the invocation to "Apollo the physician" with which it began. In practice, medicine was now much more of a business than a vocation. At times, seeing some particularly horrible example of the results of mercenary medicine, he had wondered shudderingly whether the men whom the sick wanted so badly to believe were kind and wise and merciful were not, instead, some new kind of vulture, preying on fear and disease.

And yet—"vulture" was a pretty melodramatic way of describing such people as old Turner, or Woods, or any of the other fumblers and muddlers whose intentions he was sure were of the best. Their sort were men caught in a vicious circle, forced to work overtime in order to meet a relatively high, fixed set of expenses. Money pressure and fatigue left them very little time—and, gradually, erased all inclination—to keep themselves abreast of their profession. After all, they were operating a business, in a society which maintained dollars uppermost in every mind. Sooner or later they were bound to think like businessmen and, with money paramount, the patients' needs necessarily became secondary concerns. The results could be ghastly, as Tony had seen. But who, rightly, should be blamed for the condition?

These half-trained, almost illiterate men (scientifically speaking, must be typical of a large sector of the profession elsewhere, as in Darcey. Gordon, supreme in his greatly superior skill and training, had been able to establish his own bailiwick and make the Hippocratic Oath its reigning law. He was, therefore, impatiently contemptuous of most of the Darcey doctors, who he thought were either incompetent or dishonest, or both. On their side, they reacted towards Westwood with hostility made up of various elements: fear of losing business to Gordon, or anger at having already done so; envy of his superior

resources; resentment at having to submit to Gordon's direction whenever they needed Westwood's facilities, and resentment also at the "unfair competition" of Westwood's lower-priced clinic—business reasons, nearly all of them.

Under Flannery's sardonic guidance, Tony had become aware of the war that went on between many of the Darcey doctors and Westwood. He had come to understand it as a kind of complicated business war, though no one but Tom referred to it as openly as that. The attitudes of the Darcey doctors varied according to their own positions and resources. Some, especially Herbert and the other surgeon, Hoffman, did most of their work in Hoffman's small sanitarium, located about ten miles out, half-way between Darcey and Newton. It was not large enough nor well enough equipped, however, to enable them to do without Westwood altogether. They therefore cultivated Gordon ostentatiously, and used Westwood when they needed it; but covertly tried to undermine and discredit its doctors in every way they could.

A few took a resigned attitude, sought Westwood in cases of extreme need only, but did so coolly, making no effort to co-operate. There was, however, a small, substantial group of physicians, like Garms, who really loved and respected their profession above all things, and, seeing in Westwood the highest level of medical practice within their geographical reach, worked as closely as they could with it. But since these were mainly the youngest and least influential among the doctors, and the Society was dominated by connivers like Herbert and the other specialists who used it to feed cases to themselves, its meetings were likely to be both dull and dismaying.

They were held in the Chamber of Commerce rooms—appropriately enough. Flannery had pointed out. By the time Tony and Gordon arrived, the low-ceilinged office was blue with tobacco smoke. Nearly twenty men were present. The promise of food always brought out a crowd, and, besides, there was the rumour that something very special was going to be brought up. So there they all were everybody from old Paige, who cured every ailment with castor oil and/or hot compresses, to young Elsy Burton, so fresh from medical school that he still blushed when any one called him doctor.

Gordon and Tony took chairs near the back of the room. At the officers' table sat Herbert, who was president; Gaylord, the secretary—a big, sloppy, shepherd dog of an X-ray man; and a fussy, twittering man named Ryan, looked upon as a pediatrician, who was chairman of the programme committee. As there was a very important matter to be brought before the Society, Herbert announced pompously, he had taken the liberty of revising the usual order of the

agenda, putting the visiting speaker first, the discussion of cases next, and the business meeting last. Did he hear a motion to that effect? Seconds? All in favour say Aye. Anybody against? So voted.

"The speaker of the evening"—began Ryan—"is Doctor James Hazeltine, of College Hill, whose name, at least, is known to most of you gentlemen here this evening. Or should be. Ha-ha. Doctor Hazeltine has been practising medicine in College Hill for thirty-five years, and is president of our sister society there. He knows conditions in our part of the country intimately, as only a family doctor can—knowledge and experience we must all envy . . . true country doctor of the finest traditions, as typical as you'd find in all Missouri. . . . Gentlemen, Doctor Hazeltine."

Applause. Hazeltine, shaped very much like a pouter pigeon and dressed like a gentleman of the old school, got up smiling self-consciously. They were all accustomed, he began resonantly, to hear the speaker of the evening at medical-society meetings discuss some scientific subject. But he was going to break that custom and do something sensible, in which everybody was keenly interested. That subject was something very much in the minds of every real American doctor today. "They call it medical economics in the cities," he continued, now getting fully into his stride. "Here we call it simply dollars and cents—common sense, if you will allow me my little joke. All over the country today, the medical profession is under attack. Every half-baked economist, every crackpot reformer, feels free to take a poke at us. We have become the whipping boy of the reformers, and are being blamed for every social ill. We are held at fault for the fact that millions of people receive no medical care because they do not have the money to pay for it. Does anybody blame the grocer because they can't buy food? Or the landlord because they can't afford good housing? I've been in practice for many years, and my own experience, gentlemen, confirms something that we all know; something that is just common garden-variety ordinary sense, and that is, that if people have enough to eat and warm clothes to wear and get enough rest and have comfortably warm houses, half the battle of disease has already been won! We all know that this is the most important half. . . .

"I am not denying the bad conditions that exist in this country, as regards medical care as well as in other fields. But I do feel that we doctors are being made the goat of this situation which is not of our creating. There is under way a drive to eliminate private medicine, and draft us all into some kind of bureaucratic public system. The campaign against us, this drive of slander and discredit, is made to prepare the way. I feel very strongly that we doctors must demobilise all our resources, and get behind

the leadership of our national organization, to fight this drive. Let the problem of indigency be solved, by all means. But why saddle us with it? We have been carrying burdens already, that no other profession assumes. Does anybody expect lawyers to give their services free, at any time? Yet this is what we have been doing as a matter of course. But it is not enough for the reformers that we shoulder more than our share of these humane burdens. We are expected to shoulder all of it, and provide free, or almost free, medicine to everybody who needs it—or else be wiped out.

"Day by day, the government is encroaching on our profession more and more, giving medicines away, giving services away, making it more and more difficult for us to earn our livings at this profession which we have spent long years training for. Any fair-minded person will agree that this is unjust. It is our business to make the people of this country realize the danger. We have to protect them, rich and poor alike, from any form of socialized medicine, whether it be complete medical care for all the people at public expense, as in Communist Russia, or partial care as in the German system of socialized medicine, or the panel arrangement adopted by England. The American system contains the inherent principle of free choice of physician, and it has stimulated the greatest medical progress ever known. We should investigate and correct its abuses, but we should not allow it to be destroyed. We must protect the public from this drive.

"It is our duty to our profession also to protect our patients from the crying abuses of our profession, such as incompetent and mercenary physicians, ignorant cult practitioners and fraudulent patent medicines. I say, too, we must look into the question of clinics. True, indigent patients must be paid for by public money, in some way. Formerly, we carried them, allowing the paying patients to shoulder part of the burden. But this is no longer possible. Indigent patients must be paid for, but their treatment should remain in private hands. Cut-rate clinics constitute unfair medicine. People well able to pay private fees patronize them by the hundreds, making it almost impossible for the bona fide competent private practitioner to charge equitable fees that will allow him to maintain an adequate private office, properly equipped. Gentlemen, we must all wake up to this campaign that is going on. Sooner or later, it will become a real issue here in Darcey, if it is not one already. We must be on our guard, and rally to protect our patients from regimentation and medical dictatorship."

This speech, delivered with a mixture of good humour and outraged sincerity in its overtones, made a very deep impression. The voice was the voice of Hazeltine, but the thoughts were those of most of the physicians, as Tony

could see by their faces. They had sat as if in church, listening to a familiar and unquestioned ritual. Only the group represented by Garms looked fidgety.

Herbert, apparently, had known what was going to be said. There was a look of satisfied smugness on his face that was several shades different from the righteous alarm written in the expressions of most of his colleagues. When the applause broke out, fast and loud, one or two of the men turned to glance at Gordon. Ah, thought Tony. So that clinic crack wasn't accidental. Herbert is up to something, all right.

Somebody—oh, it was Garms—had something he wanted to say. "I'm sorry, Doctor Garms," said Herbert, elaborately consulting his watch, "but the agenda is very long and full this evening and I'm afraid we'll have to confine all discussion from the floor to the medical cases. The other doctors will agree with me, I'm sure, that professional subjects should be given the preference. We'll have plenty of time to talk among ourselves about the issue Doctor Hazeltine has so clearly and forcefully put before us though I do not imagine there would be much difference of opinion among us. Our professional interests are all the same, of course, since they relate primarily to the welfare of the patient. . . . I want to thank you, Doctor Hazeltine, on behalf of our Society, for having given so generously of your valuable time to us this evening. I assure you it will not go unappreciated, ha-ha. The parable of seeds upon the stony ground, you know. Ha-ha. And now Doctor Ryan has a brief paper he wishes to present. A very interesting case of bone sarcoma, very interesting indeed. . . . Doctor Ryan."

Fussily, Ryan got up and spread some papers out on the table in front of him. Then he unrolled a long chart and pinned it up on the wall. Nobody could see what was on it, as he was aware. "It's the kiddie's fever chart," he said, and picked up a pointer. "The temperature goes up and down, quite erratically, almost throughout the entire conduct of the case," and he zigzagged the pointer up and down accordingly. "Towards the end it flattens out—right here, you see—and that, of course, is when the kiddie got better.

"It's a thirteen-year-old boy. The case was referred to me by Doctor Harris out near Newtown. Been running a slight temperature for some time, and having this pain in his leg. Temperature kept on going, so he sent the kiddie to me for diagnosis—right here, you see," indicating with the pointer, "and the temperature was up. This doctor knew I had done quite a little children's work, so he called me right in. At first, I didn't know exactly what to make of it. History was that the patient had fallen down in a baseball game, and didn't notice any ill effects at the time.

Later, he began to have this pain in his leg, and hot compresses were tried, of course, but he still complained of the pain.

"When they brought the kiddie to me I took him right over to Doctor Gaylord's, and we got some plates indicating bone sarcoma. Fortunately, chest plates showed that it had not spread to the lungs. The only thing unusual on that plate were the ribs, which were very fragile. Kiddie went into the hospital, of course—the Newton Hospital—and Doctor Herbert operated and removed a cyst-like tumour from the bone. Oh, yes, the temperature continued erratic all the time the boy was in the hospital. Incidentally, a rather interesting thing happened before he was operated on; he passed a kidney stone. He's doing nicely now, as well as could be expected after a major operation, of course, only his temperature continued up and down—see, here it is on the chart—and he began to complain of pain in the other leg. So we've just X-rayed that, and he seemed to have some suspicious-looking developments in the left femur too. It's a very interesting case, very interesting. Doctor Herbert and I have discussed it quite a lot. . . . Well, I guess that's all, unless any of you gentlemen would like to ask any questions?" ended Ryan nasally, and giggled a little nervously, looking first at Herbert and then at Gordon.

And he was right to be nervous, thought Tony, seeing how Gordon's face had turned first pink and then crimson and finally almost purple, while he listened to that ghastly story of mayhem masquerading as a scientific report. Ryan had stepped squarely on Gordon's most sensitive nerve—his passion for good medicine—and now the big man rose, looking twice as large as usual, with his eyes blazing and rage distending the veins of his throat. The Angel with the fiery sword must look like that, glasses and all, thought Tony irreverently, as Gordon, keeping his voice level, queried:

"As I understand this case, you have a boy of thirteen with bone cysts of both thighs and a history of a kidney stone?"

"Yes, Doctor," Ryan said peevishly, "but the involvement of the other leg was not discovered until after the operation."

"Perhaps I missed it, but I didn't hear you say anything about the pathological report on the tissues removed at operation."

"Well, as a matter of fact," Herbert spoke up smoothly, "the tissue just fell to pieces, and we couldn't get enough of a specimen to send to a laboratory. But it looked like sarcoma all right."

"It's odd," Gordon was elaborately polite. "If Doctor Herbert hadn't said it looked like sarcoma, I would have

been sure, from the description of the case—kidney stone, bone cysts—that it was one of these parathyroid tumours that have been described in the literature of the past three or four years. And in that case, of course, the operation should have been on the neck, to remove the parathyroid tumour, rather than on the cyst. The X-ray appearance of a cyst is really due not to any growth, but to a resorption of the bone calcium because of the parathyroid tumour. And removing any remaining bone in these cases”—his voice thinned—“leads to a pathological fracture which will never heal unless the parathyroid tumour is removed . . . and in many cases even when that is done, these children are left permanently crippled because of the shortening of the bone produced by the operation.”

Suddenly he shot a question at Herbert: “Were any blood-calcium and phosphorus determinations made to rule on whether this was or was not a parathyroid tumour?”

“No, Doctor,” answered Herbert, in a patient tone of an adult talking to a child. “We don’t go through a lot of unnecessary laboratory work when we get a clear-cut case of sarcoma. We don’t believe in making guinea pigs of our patients.”

Somebody tittered. The light flashed on Gordon’s glasses as his head swung around in the direction of that laugh. Then he turned to Herbert again, and talked leaning forward, his hands grasping the back of the chair in front of him, the weight of his big body straining the knuckles white. Watching those hands, which he had seen plan, discover, and act with a swift daring that only the greatest of surgeons possess, Tony was seized by a kind of humility and love he had not felt even for his father. Here was a great surgeon, a great man, and he was being sneered and picked at by medical and moral Lilliputians. Damn it, they should be sitting at his feet and asking counsel, humbly.

Instead . . . instead? Tony looked at the men around him. He could see, on their faces, a mixture of emotions, dominated by a real, an intense, interest in what Gordon was saying. They believed him; whatever they did, for whatever financial reason, professionally they believed him. Under other circumstances, they would have accepted him gladly, as their teacher.

Amazed, Tony heard Gordon finishing, his tone dangerously sweet: “I wouldn’t dream of doubting your word, Doctor Herbert. But the final test for a sarcoma is the pathological report, which in this case seems sadly lacking. Furthermore, the history is so typically that of a parathyroid tumour that I would strongly urge, for the sake of your patient, and your own professional satisfaction, that you give him the benefit of a consultation at Boone. If it’s a parathyroid tumour, as I suspect it is, he may be a cripple for life anyway, but he will at least be

alive. And if it's really a sarcoma, since his lungs are still clear, according to your plates, the indication is for X-ray treatment which neither Newton nor even Westwood is equipped to give."

"So kind of you to give us the benefit of your erudition, Doctor Gordon," bowed Herbert. "And now, if you will permit us, we will have to cut the discussion short, as I believe Doctor Woods has a case to report"—consulting a slip of paper—"a case of pneumonia alba in a newborn."

Woods—long, lank, slow-spoken and shabby, described his case. Stillbirth of this type, from a syphilitic mother, was not very usual among whites, he thought; at least not in this part of the country. The first clear-cut case of it in his experience.

"What did the mother's Wassermann show?" Tony rose to query.

"Why, it must have been positive, of course, Doctor," Woods answered amiably. "But, you see, I'd been treating the family for years—they're decent, respectable people, and it just didn't occur to me to take a Wassermann. I suppose it would be a good thing to do it routinely; I hear that's what you have been doing over at Westwood."

"We have encountered some surprising resistance to it," smiled Tony. "But our results so far seem to indicate that it is an indispensable part of the proper prenatal routine. The proportion of positives shown, for the white population, too, is very much higher than we had anticipated. Perhaps we have all been underestimating this problem of syphilis, Doctor Woods," ended Tony a shade smugly. Herbert, he noticed out of the corner of his eye, seemed upset. Yes, he was up to something all right, and whatever it was it had some connection with his syphilis work at Westwood.

It came out when, Tony having sat down again, Herbert announced that there was an interesting question the Society must deal with this evening. Public Health, he announced, had renewed its old offers of assistance with a syphilis-eradication programme. Specifically, it offered to set up a free diagnostic clinic, to assist the local physicians in corroborating their diagnosis, free of charge; also a free-treatment clinic, for the indigent, and free arsenicals, which it would give to the doctors so that they might treat every patient who could pay a fee at the lowest possible rates.

"Of course," Herbert said quickly, after having read the letter in which the offer was made, "we are all heartily in favour of this campaign, whatever criticisms we may have to make of the idea of free clinics and low-priced treatment, along the lines Doctor Hazeltine went into. It is an un-American idea, I think. Naturally, I don't mean that Public Health is not doing a splendid work, splendid,

and deserving of every co-operation we can give. There is no question of that kind at all.

"The question is a very simple one of physical facilities. As soon as this letter arrived, I made the rounds of all the possible buildings and locales in which such a clinic might be set up, and I even took up the matter with some public officials, but unfortunately the Real Estate Board and the public officials all answered that there is nothing, absolutely nothing, available. They promise to let me know the minute there is, and I'm afraid, gentlemen, that we will have to regretfully let Public Health know that it is not possible to do this, for the present, much as we appreciate their interest——"

"May I interrupt?" It was Gordon again, quite cool this time, with a smile playing over his lips.

"Yes, Doctor Gordon?"

"There is part of a wing at Westwood, which we added recently and intend to use as an isolation ward, that we would be glad to put at the disposal of Public Health for whatever length of time they wish to use it. Westwood feels very strongly that we cannot postpone a beginning to a systematic programme of syphilis eradication. What we have seen since we put our routine Wassermanns into effect has made a very deep impression on us, gentlemen. If there is no objection, I should like formally here and now to empower Doctor Herbert, as president of this Society, to convey this offer to the proper authorities?"

It was Garms who started the applause, which most of the others scatteringly joined. After that, Herbert wound up the meeting in short order. They all pushed back their chairs and stood up, taking up their exchanges of talk about cases at the point where they had left off when Herbert called them to order. Tony, exultant, went with young Burton to break out the beer. He was enjoying the largest cheese sandwich he could find when Garms came up to ask, as he did every time they met, how the Jordan business was coming along. Herbert, his ears open like wind scoops, came up right behind him—but who cared?

"I've got the goods on her at last," grinned Tony happily. "Girl came in with a peritonitis, pulled through, signed an affidavit—even willing to be a witness. What with that and the other evidence, it's just a question of time before we have her where she can't do any harm for a long, long time. And it won't take so awfully long to do it, either. I'm going to light a fire under the D.A., if I have to, but she's as good as finished right now, I'm sure of that. With evidence of criminal abortion, we've got her cold. Legally it's manslaughter, you know."

"I hear there's quite a buzz in town over your o.b. Wassermanns," broke in Herbert, with a big grin on his face.

"Buzz? How do you mean, Doctor?" Tony answered evenly.

"Oh, the ladies are shocked and all that. We're an old-fashioned town, Doctor, and most people don't appreciate having outsiders come in and try to reform them, even for their own good. They hate to have the dirt stirred up, you know. Makes them nervous."

"That's too bad," said Tony mock-sorrowfully. "Do they all have something to be nervous about Doctor?"

"You're a cocky young man, aren't you, McNeill? Galahad on his white horse, riding for a fall. Ha-ha!" clapping Garms on the back, and laughing loudly.

Garms was a little man with a sorrel moustache and a pugnacious chin. Glaring after Herbert, he rubbed his back and gulped.

"Damn his eyes!"

"It wouldn't pay to take a poke at him," counselled Tony, soothingly. "Let him Galahad me till the cows come home. Gordon's back of us. Public Health is back of us. What can he do?"

Garms scowled. "Plenty. You're not going to convert Herbert or stop him from chiselling and stalling; not him nor any of his crowd." He paused. "What makes me sick," he continued, "is wondering what our patients, the decent, broke, or half-broke people of this town and the farmers that trade here and doctor here—how would they feel, what would they think, if they sat in at a meeting like this? I wouldn't want 'em to hear what Gordon did to Ryan—the profession has got to have some public confidence and faith, or it can't function at all. But Hazeltine—that damned old fool sounded like a pants merchant."

"The crowd seemed to swallow it," observed Tony.

"They didn't" Garms denied stoutly. "We're not all fools in this town. The younger men—we have to keep quiet."

Burton nodded in sad agreement.

"References? Quid pro quo stuff?"

"Right. And try oaring in at one of these meetings. You saw Herbert steam-roller me this evening. Just the same, I'm willing to bet that if you could get a secret ballot on the question, you'd find that more than half of the docs even in Darcey know damned well it isn't common sense, let alone common humanity, to tell our out-of-work workingman he's out of luck for medical care just because he can't pay for it. What happens if you do? The family goes to pot, the man becomes unemployable; the State has to pay the bill in the end, and it's several times as big as it needs to be."

"Well, what's the answer, then?"

"Pay for clinic work, to begin with. If we younger men got that, we'd do a lot better work—and be able to call our

souls our own. As for the rest, bring on your health insurance, state medicine for the indigent, or what have you. I'm not a pants mercant. I want to practise my profession. If I can't practise decently under the present set-up, let's have a different set-up."

Young Burton downed his third beer and rose "You said a mouthful, Doctor. As for me, I'm willing to say," he looked around cautiously and his voice dropped to a whisper, "if I have to listen to Hazeltine's bedtime stories once more, I'll throw up all over the Chamber of Commerce's red plush. Let's go."

"Westwood, good evening! . . . No, Doctor Gordon is at a medical meeting; I can have him called if it's urgent. Yes. . . . Yes, Mrs. Edwards. I'll let him know right away. You're bringing your daughter right over? Yes, I'll let Doctor Gordon know. He'll order a room prepared. All right, Mrs. Edwards.

"Hallo, hallo! Will you please call Doctor Gordon, he's in the club-rooms attending a medical meeting. . . . This is Westwood calling, very urgent, please. . . . Hallo. Doctor Gordon? Doctor Flannery said I'd better let you know. Mrs. Edwards called; it seems her daughter Lucy is in great pain. Hasn't been feeling well for a couple of days. She's bringing her over. . . . Yes, Doctor Gordon, I'll tell Miss Ward. . . . All right, Doctor.

"Westwood, good-evening! No, Doctor Gordon isn't here now, but he will be back shortly. Will you talk to Doctor Flannery? Yes, Doctor Harris. You're bringing a patient in to be delivered. Doctor Gordon may have to operate. . . . Yes, Doctor. We'll have everything ready."

Young John Oliver sighed, plugged the bell for Miss Ward, transmitted the messages and instructions, adjusted his earphones more comfortably, and resumed his book, *Microbe Hunters*, for young John idolized Gordon and expected to be like him some day.

Gordon and Tony, having got a cab and made it speed, were already back and into their whites when Mrs. Edwards arrived. While Gordon examined Lucy, Flannery and Tony stood by. Tony knew the girl—had danced with her, roasted frankfurters, kidded around at parties. Peritonitis—advanced. But no ruptured appendix. There had been an abortion. The girl died on the table. Tony stripped off his gloves and gazed at Gordon. He felt somehow personally involved in this horror. "Nightmare," he muttered inadequately. "Will you talk to the parents, or shall I, Chief?"

"I'll talk to them," said Gordon grimly. "They'll take it better from me."

"Jordan, do you think?"

"I'd bet every inch of Westwood on it. But it'll be the

last one, son. We'll slap that complaint through first thing to-morrow. I should have gone after her long ago." And his voice—could it be possible?—quivered slightly.

Tony, making out the death certificate at the desk, felt sorry for Gordon with his job of telling Lucy's parents what had happened. They weren't taking his tale easily—shocked and grief-torn at the loss of their only daughter, they were indignant at Gordon's explanation of her death. Lucy was a good girl! They could believe nothing else. They'd sue Gordon for slander!

"That won't bring Lucy back," Gordon said curtly.

Tony, while they still talked, telephoned the young man who had always paired off with Lucy. Sometimes, Darcey customs simplified things. Roy came to the hospital immediately, and with tears in his eyes told Tony what had happened. She'd got "caught" and she'd gone to Mattie Jordon. Things weren't right. Last night she'd had cramps—no, he, Roy, hadn't paid for it. He didn't trust the old nigger. They could have been married, but Lucy wanted to wait until he was making more money. He was only an eighteen-dollar-a-week clerk in the bank. Would he testify? Gee, he couldn't do that. "It would make an awful stink, Tony. I'd lose my job."

"Okay. I'll try to keep you out of it."

When he went back upstairs, the delivery had come in. A farm woman, forty years old, with a constricted pelvis. Harris, her own doctor, thought it was a breech and was afraid she hadn't chance. Routinely, this was Tony's job. He'd been doing a lot of deliveries during the past year, but he was scared by one like this. He went in search of Gordon. "Chief——"

"Something wrong?"

"Yes, sir. Will you. . . ."

Gordon came and examined the woman; her face was flushed purple-red, and she moaned in a delirium of pain and fever. Tony stood ready with the hypo and at Gordon's nod administered the drug. He followed the chief out to the hall, where Gordon was talking to Harris and to the husband. "It's the only thing to do—besides, the baby starts life with a much better chance."

He was going to operate. Tony passed the word to Miss Dulaney. Almost at once he heard the girls moving swiftly about upstairs. Slowly, the hospital took on anew the air of tension which accompanied an emergency at Westwood. It was because Gordon worked that way—keyed up to the highest energy his personal dynamo could attain, sensitive as the most delicate electric needle to the patient's needs. At times like these the hospital breathed lightly, and the signal from the operating-room telling that he was through always brought a small sigh of relief throughout the building.

Gordon came to stand beside Tony at the scrub-up basin. "You're doing this one, Tony," he said, calmly. As calmly as he might have said, "Let's go to the movies."

Tony scrubbed his arms, his wrist, his knuckles, his fingernails. Switched the brush to his other hand and stood looking at it. "Did you say——"

"I said, 'You're doing this C.S.' "

"Yes. I thought you did. Chief——"

"You'll never start any younger."

"No-o."

"If you're to do the o.b. work here, Cæsareans ought to be a part of your experience."

"Yes, sir." His legs were boned with jelly. His mouth was dry, and his tongue thick. "I'm scared green, Chief."

"Sure you're scared. But don't let Miss Gates know it."

That had been the right thing to say to him. Tony grinned, and began again the rhythmic scrub-scrub with the brush. "You'll watch me——"

"Sure. You'll be all right, Tony."

Gordon was a prince. A smaller man would have let Tony assist for ever, only giving him a chance to operate when he himself was unavailable. But Gordon was conscientious about training and equipping a man. He knew there was surgery enough, and to spare, in the world for both him and Tony. And to give him this break, this sign of confidence now, when he knew Tony was nervous over the gossip that was stirring up against him. . . Lord, it was like a moral shot in the arm. A prince? He was a master, a saint! . . . Then the job began, and all Tony's brain was in his hands.

The operation was over. Tony knew he had done a job. He knew it was a success and he was swept with the conflicting winds of emotional reaction. He was tired—every nerve and muscle that he had held taut for those anxious hours, now ached and throbbed. But it was not a fatigue which sought or would accept sleep. He wished he could tell someone about his triumph, someone who would think him fine and wonderful. Well. Nice idea, at two o'clock in the morning. Maybe that was what marriage was for. He wound up the night's duties, undressed, and dropped heavily into bed. Forty seconds later he was dead to the world.

Chapter Ten

"PUT THAT one in your pipe and smoke it, sonny boy," said Jessie silently to a non-present Tony, as with exquisite care he folded back the page of the *Darcey News* on which this morning's gossip column, with the item Tony was to "put in his pipe," appeared. Neat. If Gordon

ran true to his reputation, he'd blow up like a ton of dynamite and McNeill would be out on his ear. And for once his detailed typographical directions had been carried out, so that the paragraph, headed "Postscripts to the Darcey Follies," stood out boldly, with plenty of white around it.

He wished he could have boxed it. But that would have been a little too pointed. There was an art to the presentation of news, so that even the type one used would give just the right weight towards the desired direction. Pleased, he read it again, his lips repeating the satisfactory pattern of the words.

"Folie, folie!" the paragraph began. "We danced the Old Year out, and rested our weary heads on the new. Select and elite of Darcey, matrons and buds, you were all there weaving the tapestries of enchantment. Eros, mischievous pursuer, your plangent cohorts saw us home. Merriest of the merry, Peggy White, Belle Sanford, Fritzie Engel, Jane Morse.... And above all, Marietta Doyle, with Galahad winging homeward at three-thirty, before the orchestra plaintively ended its reign... Westwood, you reclaimed your wandering Esculapius at six, full-blushing dawn of the new day." *Ah, there, Galahad!*

He tucked the paper under his arm and swung down the street jauntily, turning in at one of Darcey's more pretentious office buildings. Pulling his coat smooth, he stepped into the elevator, and adjusted his hat a fraction of an inch farther down over his right eye. "Four please," he said. the frosted glass door, neatly lettered in gold. **KENNETH FRAZIER, ATTORNEY AT LAW**, was at the end of the hall. Automatically Jessie turned left towards it.

"Well, well, news hound!" greeted the blond, sullen-mouthed young man. "Quite a piece of dirt you sprung about the young doc and Marietta Doyle—got half the town looking up wards at the Library. Aren't you afraid Mike will kill you or something, when he comes back to town?"

"I can take care of myself. And Marietta has it coming to her, for getting tangled up with the honourable touch-me-not. Say, have they been in to see you about Mattie yet?"

"Who?"

"You know who. It seems McNeill told somebody the other night at a medical meeting that they had the goods on her, cold, and were going to see that she was prosecuted. Has the complaint been lodged yet at the D.A.'s office? You ought to know."

"What's it to you whether it has or not?"

"Oh, I've nothing against Jordan, and I don't see what business it is of McNeill's, anyhow. They've got all the business they can handle out at Westwood. Besides, any town has to have somebody that can take care of these

things. I'd bet if it was put to vote, she'd win hands down."

The other man laughed. "I'll say! Plenty of homes would have been busted up, and no end of scandals, if she hadn't been so handy. But there ain't no justice, Jessie, when these holier-than-thou guys get to messing around. The fact is, the complaint is in, but I hear the girl works in Goode's shoe factory, and they've tipped them off. Seems the foreman went to see her old man, and the girl has backed down on the whole business. The only trouble is" worriedly he stopped to relight his cigar, gnawing at it for a few seconds.

"Yes? Somebody else?"

"Yes. Edwards." And he stopped, watching consternation flash into Jessie's face.

"The devil! Then Lucy...I could have thought of that. It must have hit her father hard."

"Plenty hard. Says he's going to see the old witch in hell before he gets through. Says he hasn't anything more to lose, and at least no other girl—all that stuff. So Mattie will just have to clear out, I expect."

"Yeah. The trouble is, she says she won't. Set as a mule about it. Says she's paid out plenty of good money, and she's entitled to some of the protection she's been investing in for so long. Goes on and on about how she lined up the negro vote and did favours here and there. She's kept records of everybody that got paid off, too, and how much she contributed to whose campaign funds and all."

"The old devil. But she can't prove any of it. What the hell! She doesn't stand a chance, Jessie. There's no use getting everybody balled up in this. She'll just have to beat it or go to jail. And you tell her that, see?"

"Oh, yeah? Well, as a matter of fact, I did. And she says if they bring her to trial, she'll talk. Maybe she can't prove anything and maybe she can, but by the time she gets through with the list of the illegals she's done, it won't make much difference what she proves. When this town starts talking, nobody goes around looking for proofs of anything. She says she'll begin with the D.A., and go right down the line; and it doesn't sound so pretty when she says it, either."

The weak, handsome lines of young Frazier's face sharpened with fear, and his pink cheeks paled slightly, bringing out the already sagging purplish bags under his eyes. He picked up a letter opener, nervously ran the sharp point under the glass of his desk, then repeated the gesture. "So what?" he said, after a long time.

"So the heat's turned on Galahad, and he'll either tear up his evidence or I'll smear him so good he'll have to throw up his job. I can get plenty more dirt where that first hunk came from."

"Hmmm. Maybe yes, maybe no. Besides, it's risky trying open blackmail like that, Jessie. And what about Edwards?"

"I hadn't figured on Edwards," admitted Jessie slowly. "With that in the picture, it wouldn't make much difference what Galahad does, I guess."

"No. He's smeared already, anyhow, and it's no skin off my nose how hot the town gets for him after your little gem. But if Edwards brings Jordan to trial, and Westwood backs him up—and they will, I'll bet—Gordon's another plaster saint—and she talks... Oh, Jesus!"

They sat for a while, each making small nervous movements: flipping ashes, opening out paper clips, running the edges of their fingers along the ends of the desk.

"Well." It was Frazier who brought in the tone of finality. "They'll just have to call in the emergency squad or something. The boys down in Cypress Flats. Anything for a hundred bucks. Run her out of town, or..."

"Or?" A strange light glowed in Jessie's eyes.

Frazier shrugged. "It's their job, and they'll have to do it their way. I won't know anything about it. It'll have to be fixed by the district captain down there. And if I were you, Jessie, I'd get me a job somewhere else. I'm in the clear, but maybe you aren't. Maybe you haven't been so careful about getting it always in cash...or alone. Better go hunt the muse in Chicago, or something. Just in case."

"Yeah. It's an idea. A hot one, Frazier. But since it's your best legal advice, maybe I'll take it. How about a little something in the way of a loan, towards the railroad fare?"

"Good old Jessie! You always make the most of a situation, don't you, wise guy? Never mind, there's no answer. Here's twenty-five, it's all I've got here, and I'm not making out any cheques, see? Good-bye, Jessie. See you in the dog pound."

"Or in the syphilis clinic," said Jessie, and went out, slamming the door on that last flourish of malice. This was the vein that had been his bonanza in Darcey. Elsewhere, it would have its applications. It was secreted, as Jessie was vaguely aware, out of deep stores of bitterness produced by his loneliness and isolation. It was his revenge on the town, and would be his revenge on the world, for his misshapen, tortured portion of life. Some day, by God, he'd hit the big money—come back with a whip hand and buy the whole place, make it crawl, make it kiss the very ground he walked on.

Westwood Hospital was sleepily silent when Tony sat down to his lunch. Pot roast, mashed potatoes and gravy, cherry pie. His favourites, and Esther knew it. There was

a letter on the tray, and a folded copy of this morning's *Darcey News*. He almost never had time to look at the paper before noon. All the staff had to squeeze the last minute of work out of the morning to get through the heavy routine and do the new work too. At this time of the year especially, with all the pneumonias and the accidents on the sleety roads.

The letter was official-looking, and bore the return address of the Boone Hospital Association. Probably the notice of some clinic or alumni activity. Casually, he slit the envelop open with his butter knife and spread it out on his desk by the side of the tray. "Dear Doctor McNeil.....and in view of your fine record here as interne, and your special interest in this field, we are offering you the position. We ask that you give this matter serious thought, and if you are interested, come to St. Louis, at our expense, to discuss details with us. Since the work will not begin until the first of September, and we understand your first year at Westwood would terminate before that date, we are assuming the choice will be open to you. We would, however, like to get the matter settled within the next few weeks. Of course, we expect you to write, or come to St. Louis, at your own convenience. Yours...."

Well! Resident surgeon of Choteau Hospital, of the Boone group, walking the wards with a respectful nurse at his heels, inspecting the diet kitchens, calling green internes to task. He'd have his own office and secretary, his own apartment. His name would go droning through the amplifiers on six floors. "Doctor McNeill. Doctor A. E. McNeei-ll," importantly. He'd be near Breaker. near all his friends in the city. And nobody would care whom he went out with, nor how often. None of this small-town life in a goldfish bowl.

Tony propped the letter up against his father's picture and smilingly began on his lunch. Ummm, it was good. That was one thing he'd miss about Westwood, Esther's marvellous food. Saving the best pieces for him, keeping things hot, garnishing his pie with a mound of ice cream out of the soft diet freezer. Asking to be shown how to brew the hot black English tea he enjoyed so much. He'd heard Asy saying to Esther once that he was the "eatinest young man," and he certainly did like good food and plenty of it. Funny how medicine seemed to heighten your bodily wants and enjoyments. The nervous tension, the fatigue, and the completely physical world you moved in seemed to make you more of an animal when you relaxed. Though at times you did have an utter revulsion from it, a complete rejection of your senses, and a longing to rest in some serene and neuter world. Hmmm. He'd have to work even harder at Boone than he did at West-

wood. but it would be different work. More precise, and more impersonal.

Yes, there'd be less contact with the patients as human beings. He'd never know, as he did in Darcey, the full rounded story of the organism, never be able to make the relation so clearly between disease and the life. The other would be much more mechanical. Precise, but somehow incomplete and, to him at least, not nearly so interesting. He'd never been much drawn to the laboratory side of things. Maybe his childish dreams of the kind of doctor he was going to be had something to do with his contentment at Westwood. A modern continuation of his father. Silly business, letting sentiment throw shadows of regret over such a day, such a letter, such a flattering, exciting opportunity as the one he was being offered. And no Gordon to bark at him either, if a retractor slipped a trifle. One couldn't always prevent it. Once Gordon had even told him the heels of his shoes needed straightening. A grown man shouldn't have to submit to that kind of petty regimenting. Try and find another assistant who could take it as he had—work as hard, be as disciplined—and still be as good a physician, good enough to get an offer like this.

He practically knew the letter by heart when he poured his tea. There was time for a cigarette and a glance at the paper. He settled back, ran his eyes over the front page, indifferently. More of the same. They ought to build a fence around Europe and let us do our work in peace. On the inside page, ads, editorials.... His eyes gravitated suddenly to his own name in Jessie's column. What the hell! Rage flared through him, then chilled to something almost like terror. The insolent bastard! Making free with a man's name, his reputation, his career. . . . God, a doctor couldn't afford *any* kind of a slur.

Oh! ashamed, he realized that his first thought had been of his *own* name, his *own* reputation. What about Marietta? It was even worse for a girl, getting her name pawed around. What the devil should he do? Beat the rat up? That would be even worse. All Darcey would know, and would consider it proof of the innuendo. Not that it bothered with proof, but the story would last even longer. In the old days, a man would have shot him, or challenged him to a duel, or something. Now? Did they sue, or what? Oh Lord. He'd better see Gordon immediately.

He changed quickly from his apron into the white linen suit he wore during out-patient clinic hours, stuffed the letter in his pocket, took the paper, and headed for the examining rooms, where Gordon probably would be. The hospital was very still. There was that lull which fell between the clatter of the dinner trays and the arrival of the afternoon visitors. The sun was beating in through the south windows of the second-floor parlour. Steam

hissed in the radiators. A few out-patients had already arrived—they had to take their turn, and the experienced ones came early. Tony greeted the assemblage impersonally. Had that damn paragraph made him hypersensitive, or did one or two of them look at him with a knowing smile? It made his skin crawl, being lowered like that in the eyes of these people who must have respect and confidence in him. A doctor needed trust, to treat ills necessarily emotional, as well as organic. Destruction of that—the least impairment of it—took a very precious thing from him. Oh, Lord, Lord, what a filthy mess!

Gordon was in the dressing-room, checking the card. From long practice, Miss Gates knew exactly what to have ready, but the chief's rigid habits of precision made him go over all the crucial details. Genius—the infinite capacity for taking pains. Even in this, he was a great surgeon. He looked up as Tony came in. Had he seen that damned paragraph, or did he seem harsh and distant simply because he was busy?

"Can you run a G. I. this afternoon, Doctor?"

"Easy. One hand tied behind me." Now wasn't that a silly way to answer? Was he so jittery he couldn't even behave professionally?

"The patient is awaiting downstairs," said Gordon curtly.

"Yes, sir. I have something I want to talk to you about, Chief. Have you a few moments?"

Gordon shuffled through the history cards in his hand. "Yes, I expect so. I'll need a small syringe, too, Miss Gates. Bulb syringe. Thank you, that's all for just now. I'll call when I'm ready for you again."

Obediently, he went out, eyeing Tony swiftly. Ah, he'd get it from the nurses too. Nothing a nurse liked better than to see a doctor get taken down a few pegs. It would be a carnival for them, much as they had seemed to like him.

"I . . . It's about that thing in this morning's paper, sir. Have you seen it?"

"Yes." No comment, no sympathy, no questions. Blank as a wall. Inflexible as—a Savonarola, or a witch-burning Puritan.

"I'm ready to tender my resignation, sir."

The older man walked over to the window, and stood there looking out. Tony waited silently, his shoulders back, his whole body stiff, like a soldier at attention. He could see only Gordon's profile, raised, immobile, the jaws set. He seemed suddenly much older, too. Hair noticeably thin on top. Tired lines around his eyes. Sag in the muscles of his neck. Tony's resentment and fear melted humbly, and tears welled in his eyes. He was dreadfully ashamed.

"McNeill, it's not my business to punish you. Your private life is your own affair, but you understood, of course,

what a thing like that can do to a doctor's reputation especially in a small town. A hospital is only as good as its doctors, of course. We have a difficult situation here, in any case, and we have always been extremely careful to keep even our personal affairs beyond criticism. We cannot afford the smallest slur, in any connection. I had hoped you would see that clearly. I tried to explain it to you. Probably Flannery did too. You're a young man and a healthy one. I'm not setting up false moral standards, you understand. But——"

Tony nodded, unable to speak.

"I hate to do this, son," Gordon went on gently. "Except for this—unfortunate sloppiness—you have all the makings of a fine physician. I had asked for a first-rate man, and I thought I had one. Professionally, I have no criticism what ever to make. I am convinced of your ability, and it is a great loss to Westwood that you cannot continue here. But Westwood must have a man not only professionally as fine as you—and with your fundamentally good character. Westwood must have a man who cannot be criticized on any account. Possibly I made a mistake in not taking on an older man, instead of you. More..... settled. Married, perhaps. But, you see, I wanted to train my own man, right from the start. Have him grow with Westwood. Live in it. Build his life around it. Carry on....."

"Chief . . . please." Tony's voice shook. "I've been an awful fool. Made a mess of my first real responsibility. How can I go to Boone, now, with my name trailing around in dirty talk?"

"Boone?" Gordon turned completely around and looked at Tony with surprise. He was almost smiling.

"Yes, sir." Tony handed him the letter.

Gordon read, and then looked up, grinning broadly. He held out his hand. Tony extended his quickly. Gordon gripped it hard. "That's quite an offer, Tony. And . . . Boone knows what it's doing."

"Thank you, Chief. I . . . I'm going to think it over very carefully."

"You must accept it, Tony. And I shall insist on writing a report on your work here. It has been very fine."

"Doctor Gordon . . . please. I am not sure I should accept. Something may turn up later . . . You know how talk of that kind never dies, completely."

"Nonsense. In a big city, nobody gives a hoot. The thing has nothing to do with St. Louis, or Boone. Something like that could be said about almost any young man. No, you're wrong to think this would loom as black at Boone as it does in Darcey. You've learned your lesson, I hope, and will steer yourself more sensibly in

the future. But there's no sense in making a martyr of yourself over it, sacrificing your entire career."

He needn't *push*. Either Tony's crime was so black it would disgrace Westwood for ever, and he deserved to leave, or else it wasn't. Did Westwood want to get rid of him, anyhow, and was Gordon using this as an excuse?

"If you were through with me here, sir," he said stiffly, "you should have said so."

"Tony, for God's sake! Treat this like a man. It's high time you grew up to your years. All right. I'll butter your pride. I need you at Westwood. Doing the quality work you have done, your position here would have been yours as long as you wanted it. You are leaving simply because the social mechanics of a small town are full of prejudices and atavisms. You have broken a taboo, as Tom would say. Westwood must be protected at all costs. It is a sacrifice out of all proportion to your . . . crime," and he smiled faintly. "But its by-products jeopardize something even more important than your career, Tony. Or mine. Can't you see it is not a personal thing? It's as if you were a . . . typhoid carrier, perhaps. Had to be removed, isolated, put to work in a position where that condition could do no one any harm. It's extremely fortunate for all of us that this opportunity comes at this time. Personally, I am immensely relieved. I . . . It was very difficult, indeed, for me to make the decision, Tony."

"Thanks, Chief. You . . . I don't deserve it, sir. I . . ."

"In ten years you'll be a big specialist and you'll charge old Doctor Gordon fifty dollars for a consultation." Gordon put his hand on the young man's shoulder.

Tony laughed. Uproariously. The laughter penetrated the door, and was heard across the hall, in the examining room. Amazement spread over the faces of Miss Gates and the nurse who had been whispering with her. "For heaven's sakes!" one of them commented. "I thought he was sure to be fired, seeing how crabby the chief is about gossip, and all. And now they're laughing together! Will wonders never cease?"

About four o'clock, Tony found himself free until time for his evening rounds. He felt wrung out, completely exhausted. A breath of air would help. He shucked out of his whites and into the old tweeds, but chose shirt and tie very carefully. Then he put fresh tobacco in his pipe, made sure he had matches. Perhaps he'd run into Carolyn. She was always taking walks. Nice girl, Carolyn. Her softness, her obvious respect for him, and the strength of character underlying her clear calm . . . she'd be balm in Gilead, considering the state he was in.

The Boone letter rustled as he threw the white coat in the hamper. Retrieving it, he decided he might as

well take care of that matter now, and went across to the office, to find Miss Hall. "Take a letter?" he smiled.

"Of course." She folded back the pages of her dictation book and waited.

Tony gave her the heading and salutation. Then hesitated, and resumed. "Say: 'I received your letter of January seventh, and need not say I appreciate the . . . er . . . the compliment of your offer. I have given the matter careful thought, and have decided to accept the opportunity you have so kindly extended to me. I shall make an effort to come to St. Louis within the present week.' Paragraph. 'As to the date on which my work would begin'"—the phone rang sharply.

"Sorry, Doctor McNeill. Doctor Gordon wants me—in a hurry, he says. May I finish it for you later?"

"Of course, Miss Hall. Thank you."

She was looking at him oddly. "I'm sorry you are going to leave Westwood, Doctor McNeill. We . . . everybody will be sorry."

"It's nice of you," he said, embarrassed. "Later, then." And left quickly.

Gordon had a history he wanted to dictate. In the middle of it, he was called to the phone, and Miss Hall, left with Miss Gates, burst out: "Doctor McNeill's leaving! He's been offered a big job at Boone. Can you beat it?"

"Job, nothing. He's been fired, that's what. You know how Gordon is about gossip."

"Well, he's got a job. I know that. The letter came before anybody had seen the paper. He was dictating the answer just now."

"It's funny. Maybe that's what all the celebrating was about."

"What celebrating?"

Miss Gates closed her mouth, firmly, with her characteristic I-know-something-you-don't-know look. "Never mind. I'm not supposed to mention it, really."

"Oh, is that so! Didn't I tell you something confidential, too?"

"You had no business doing that," said Miss Gates primly. Then the door opened and Gordon came in.

"All right, Miss Hall. Let's go on. Where were we? Oh, yes. X-rays show . . ."

Tony walked out of the hospital in a fatigued daze. He stopped a moment in the street, to light his pipe. Left, was the open country. Right, Trask Avenue and the town. Habit, or a vague hope, and also a shade of stubborn I'll-show-them feeling, turned him right. As he passed Marietta's house, he realized that he hadn't heard from her since New Year's Day. He'd been too proud, feeling dreadfully humiliated, to call her up. She should have written him. Let him know when she came back.

Or maybe she wasn't back. Suddenly, he wanted to see her—wanted it more than anything else in the world. Put his arms around her. Lose himself in the fragrance of her lovely hair. Should he go in? Yes, and all Darcey would see and snicker. What did he care what Darcey thought? He was free of that petty bondage now. He was going to Boone. Let them persecute the fellow that came after him, if they could find one that could take it. Marietta . . . would she care? Would she . . . would she come with him to St. Louis? He'd better go on, and stop making an ass of himself. If she loved him, she would never have done what she did, after . . .

A movement at an upstairs window of the house next door caught his eye. Somebody had been standing there, and had quickly dropped the curtain back when he looked up. There must be dozens of women behind windows in these houses, doing nothing but stare out, hours on end. What appalling barrenness in their own lives made them so desperately curious about other people's movements and concerns? Their eyes were all around him, probing, malicious, subhuman. Was there no kindness in this town? He felt a little sick, and strange, bound as in a nightmare to the same spot on the ground. Stripped, with thousands of people, staring, jeering. Humiliated, unable to stir.

He jerked forward, and went on. In front of the Taylor house, he stopped again. Then a swift impulse, which he could never have explained—nor did he stop to try—took him across the street, up the steps and on to the porch. They'd sat here that night, centuries ago, when he came to dinner and Carolyn seemed such a frail, scared little thing. She'd struggled in his arms here, the night of the dance. The memory rushed back, peculiarly tender. He rang the bell.

"Miss Taylor isn't in," the mournful butler told him. "She hasn't come back from school yet."

He was standing in the hall, hat in hand, about to leave, when he saw Mrs. Taylor coming down the stairs. She walked like a brigadier general in full uniform. Grande dame, but why so outraged? He had been a guest in this house, after all. And he was somebody, too; as good a somebody, at least, as this small old woman with the cold angry mask on her face.

One glance of hers sent the butler shuffling away, quickly. Tony stepped forward. "Carolyn is not at home, Doctor McNeill. And from now on, if you please, she will not be at home to you at all. It is surprising I should have to say it to you." The sharp little chin went up another inch. She'd snap her neck if she didn't watch out, thought Tony, smiling involuntarily.

"And you have the effrontery to smile! After the

scandal you have precipitated ! I regret very much, Doctor, that my natural courtesy to strangers opened the doors of this house to you at all. It was my impression you were a gentleman, of course. Good day," and she turned sharply rustling upstairs again

He had never been so angry in all his life. So angry he was frozen, had no words, no reactions at all. He walked back to the hospital with the blood pounding in his head. Words shaped themselves on his tongue, were swallowed again. A block from Westwood he saw that the lights in the operating room were turned on. He began to run.

A cold drizzle was coming down, and the pavements were glassy. He heard the diminishing scream of an ambulance. Then the clang of another one, also going out. As he turned into the hospital grounds, he saw the garage doors wide open. Flannery's car was gone, too. He went up the steps in two jumps. There must have been a frightful accident somewhere. Westwood would have to meet a major emergency. He'd seen two or three hurt people come in at a time, from the mines usually. Or car wrecks. But two ambulances, and Tom's car. It must have been a mass disaster. There was work for him to do; thank God he was here to do it. Every nerve in his body had gone taut, wiping out the fatigue. He was blazing with energy, and a strange happiness poured through him. He was wanted, he was useful, he was here, and he was needed!

Chapter Eleven

THE TELEPHONE girl, who usually chewed gum nonchalantly, alternating her attention between the switchboard and the pages of a movie magazine, was crying. Tony saw the pale face and blurred eyes as he flashed past. As in a dream, too, he saw Asy trotting along the hall, carrying stretchers. His mind registered their significance automatically. Stretchers—plural. Could it be something at the mine? He ripped out of his street clothes and into whites in a split-second time, put on his sneakers, raced upstairs. All the nurses he saw looked upset.

He found Flannery and Gordon scrubbing up. Both of them were obviously tense. Gordon's face lighted when Tony came in. Tom gave a little sigh of relief.

"What's up?" Tony plunged his arms into the scrubbing basin, looked from one to the other.

"Bus accident. Thirty-five school kids. They were on their way back from visiting the biscuit factory out, near

Warkick," Flannery told him, keeping, his tone impersonal.

"Great Scott! Were your boys..."

"No, Jack had a cold and stayed home, thank God. And Steve wasn't in the class that went. It was Miss Taylor's class. The fifth grade. Studying local geography, or something. We don't know who's hurt, or if it's worse than that."

Tony's heart jerked. "Carolyn Taylor was in the bus?"

"Yes. The Lord knows what would have happened if she hadn't been," Gordon put in. "It seems the bus skidded and crashed over a by-pass. Fifteen-foot drop. The top held, but the windows were all smashed. A lot of kids pinned in by debris. There was nobody with them except the Taylor girl and the driver—and he was killed."

"Where did it happen? How far out?"

"About a quarter of a mile. But the girl kept her head, like the airplane stewardess you read about. I don't know how badly hurt she was herself, but she seems to have done a real job. She saw the driver was dead—it must have been ghastly, the whole front was smashed in—so instead of screaming or fainting or running off in a panic or doing any of those fool things most women might do, she started prying the weight off the kids, wherever she could, getting the stronger boys to help her. She got them quieted down, as much as any one could under those conditions; and by the time a car came along the road—she'd figured that since it is a main highway, she'd do better to stay and help the kids than to run all that distance—she'd rescued three. I...take my hat off to her," ended Gordon.

"The people in that car called up about fifteen minutes ago," added Flannery. "That was as much as they saw. They went back right away to help Carolyn and the others. It seems she's taken command of the whole situation. I'd never have dreamed a little scared rabbit of a girl like that would have it in her."

"Neither would I," agreed Gordon.

"I would," murmured Tony.

"What did you say?"

"Nothing. How are we going to take them all? There are only—let's see. . ."

"Ten beds," Gordon said. "If we need more, we'll use army cots—our own beds—whatever there is. John Oliver is pulling all our new mattresses out of storage, and they're running the whole batch of linen and blankets through the sterilizer. I've been trying to check over, in my mind, which of the convalescents could be discharged. Joe, I think, and . . ." his voice trailed off. They were all setting up the problems they would meet, trying to solve them in advance as completely as possible.

The whole hospital seemed to whisper and hum, but very softly, like a well-oiled motor hitting on all eight. There

was a sudden clamour in the hall. The children? No, the ambulances hadn't arrived. Parents, mad with anxiety, relatives, friends, and also some sprinkling of the morbidly curious who always mill around a scene of violence. Mildred, Miss Gates reported, was all but useless at the telephone. Her little brother had been on the bus. But there was no one who could possibly take her place—they were all needed too badly elsewhere. Each one of them would have to think and move for three, if the thing turned out anywhere near as bad as it sounded.

Gordon issued his orders. Flannery would work in the delivery room, with Miss Ward, assisting. The minor cases would go there. Gordon and Tony would take the operating room, with Miss Gates as anæsthetist, and two of the other nurses assisting. They would alternate, or Tony would assist, depending on the cases. Asy would have to help John Oliver with the stretchers. Try to keep the townspeople out of it, if they could. If necessary, two of the fathers could be drafted to carry stretchers, too, under the direction of one of the nurses. Flannery must take charge of all this. This parents couldn't be sent away, but they must be kept in the sun-room. It would be sheer chaos if they started crowding into the halls. A wire had already gone to St. Louis for more antitetanus serum. They wouldn't have nearly enough, but the stuff should be here in an hour.

Twenty-one stretchers came in the side door of Westwood that afternoon. One little girl was dead. There were two minor cuts and bruises, one broken arm which was set and the child taken home. This left seventeen serious cases—two of them were to show broken vertebræ. Tony found that his hands could function steadily and skilfully, even while his heart shook with excitement and compassion, and his aching brain subtracting seventeen patients from ten beds.

The hospital was a madhouse. There could be no attempt at casts and X-rays at first. Emergency treatment was given, and the children put to bed with sedatives. The hours stretched out—one, three, five, seven... Gordon seemed made of tempered steel, endlessly functioning, tireless. Flannery worked with icy calm. He sorted out the cases as calmly as he might have arranged a basket of letters, this one marked for urgent attention, the next to be taken care of later. These first hours were the work of a Line hospital, Gordon remarked to Tony. Next, they would move back to the Base. He always talked of surgery in military terms. This accident was a major engagement.

The noise downstairs was terrific. Some of the children were screaming with pain, others whimpered helplessly. The mothers were crying in the sun-room. The cries merged into a desolate moan, rising and falling like uneasy

surf. Some of the anguish was communicated to the other patients, and the floor nurses could not answer lights fast enough.

In the operating room, where Gordon and Tony were doing the emergency cases, there wasn't a sound except an occasional request or remark. The two men worked as if they were one brain with two pairs of hands. Tony would get a case ready, Gordon would begin; Tony would scrub up, join him, close and dress the wound. Meanwhile, Gordon had begun on another, made ready by the nurse. Once Tony had to help Miss Ward get the cart through the door. It was a skull fracture—the Leigh grandchild—and he went along down the hall to make sure the child was moved with the least possible danger. On his way back, the mob in the sun-room rushed out to him. Their faces—these faces of the stupid, staring, petty women he had been bitterly remembering that afternoon—brought something like a silent sob to his throat.

What could he tell them? The pitifully inadequate phrases of reassurance that doctors use came to his lips automatically. "She'll be all right, I hope, Mrs. Leigh. The worst is over.... A broken leg, Mrs. James. Don't worry about it, it'll mend.... We don't know yet, Mrs. Morse. Doctor Gordon is operating on him now..." He saw Carolyn sitting by a window, and walked rapidly over to her. "What are you doing here? Why aren't you being taken care of? Are you hurt?"

"I'm all right, Doctor," she answered, quite impersonally. "I didn't want to be in the way. I was just waiting. I thought there might be something I could do."

"Do? Are you crazy? You've done enough. You come with me. I want Tom to look you over, and if everything is all right, I'm ordering you home to bed. Ordering, understand?"

She followed him meekly, murmuring. "I don't want to be any trouble, Doctor. Really, I'm perfectly all right." Tears now quivered in her eyes.

"Trouble! My dear child..." gently he put his arm around her, and helped her into the improvised, operating room where Flannery was working. "Tom, take care of this young lady, will you? As soon as you can. We don't want anything to happen to her, we do?"

"Oh, it's so nice of you to bother." Pink glowed faintly in the girl's tired face.

"I must go. I shall come to see you when this is over."

Half-way down the hall, Tony heard a commotion downstairs and raced down to see what was the matter. Gordon wouldn't need him for another fifteen minutes or so. The highway police were there, of all things, to arrest the driver. "He's dead," Tony told them sharply.

"Where is he? Didn't they bring him in here? We have to see the body."

"Get the hell out of this hospital." Tony yelled. "We haven't room to step, and a lot of you flat-footed policemen barge in to clutter things up. Get out right now, I tell you. And stay out!"

"Junior edition of Gordon," whispered one hurrying nurse to another.

It was nearly midnight before every case had been looked at and tentatively treated. The three doctors sat down to supper, too tired to eat, yet wolfishly hungry. The telephone was still ringing constantly. Reporters had come in from St. Louis and Kansas City. There were offers of assistance, wires, queries, seemingly by the hundred.

As they ate, Gordon outlined the plan of procedure for the night. He and Tony would begin at once. They would take the cases in turn, X-ray them, and operate as needed. Tom would take over all the routine on the other patients, attend to the relatives, see the press. The bus company officials and the insurance men would be on their tails by morning. A thing like this justified Westwood's existence—to the hilt—but taxed it far beyond its man power and equipment. They'd just have to multiply themselves. Drive through. All right, let's go!

Tony went to the basement to start Asy on the plaster, and to prepare the X-ray plates. He didn't feel tired at all. Instead, he felt strong and competent, eager to tackle this tremendous task. They worked all night, until noon the next day, only stopping to change their shoes, or drink cups of black coffee. Gordon couldn't so much as whisper when they were finished. The mirror showed Tony's eyes rimmed with red, his face as grey and lined as an old man's. The laundry hampers were overflowing. The girl who was cleaning the instruments groaned as she looked at her task. Asy declared he had carried "tongues and tongues" of plaster during the night. The skin on Tony's hands was scalded and pink. His shoulders and back ached with a searing pain.

Tom was hoarse, too, from explaining, cajoling, ordering, reassuring. Besides seeing all the people who came, he had made all the rounds, and done all the dressings. Of the seventeen injured, fourteen had been operations or wounds. Together with the other patients, it was more than enough to fill two doctors' hands. Tom had had cots set up in Gordon's office. Gordon and Tony stretched out on them and slept as if the stiff canvas were elderdown.

They emerged at six that second night to inspect their work and smile with satisfaction. They made rounds. Everything smooth. By nine, Tony was back in bed. There were two circumcisions scheduled for the morning—Gordon

was insisting that routine be preserved to as great a degree as possible.

At breakfast, he took a few moments to read the accounts of the accident as featured in the *Darcey News*. It was the most sensational thing that had ever happened in the town, and Darcey was proud, said the editor, of how it had been handled. The town owed Westwood an incalculable debt; its staff would be for ever beloved by the people. Tony smiled at the dithyrambics and read a little of it to Gordon. "We did right well—for country doctors," he admitted hoarsely.

"Country doctors my eye! We did as well as any hospital on earth, considering our size. That's the only hitch, I guess. One falls over a patient every time one steps. Or puts his foot in a bedpan."

"You're right, Tony," Flannery put in. "We did a nice job, and I have a hunch the town realizes it. And that this is going to make quite a change in a lot of little things."

"Have you seen the bus?"

"The one in the accident?"

"Yes, it's at the Ford garage. There's a crowd in there all the time, looking at it. People from out of town, too. And is it a wreck! It gives me the shivers."

"Do you suppose all those children are hurt as bad as the paper says? My next-door neighbour's child was in it, but she got away with a few black and blue spots and a cut on the knee."

"You'd believe even worse than the paper says, if you saw the bus. It's simply crumpled. But Judith Flannery says nearly every one of them stands a good chance of getting well."

"Westwood Hospital is all right, I guess."

"Tell me, did you hear the young doctor—McNeill—was leaving?"

"Leaving? What in the world for? I've heard that Gordon thinks the world and all of him, and they sure seem to need him. I hear he knows his business delivering babies, too."

"Something about the scandal, over Marietta."

"What scandal? Oh, you mean that dirty little piece in the paper? Nobody remembers that any more. They've got plenty more to think about, I guess."

"Do you suppose there was anything to it?"

"Oh, maybe. You know Marietta—she doesn't give a damn. Still and all, there was an awful lot of stuff used to come out in that column of Jessie's that was a lot meaner than it needed to be."

"Why do you suppose it isn't in the paper any more? Somebody kick, maybe?"

"I hear he's left town. Somebody saw him around with

two beautiful shiners. They say it was Mike Doyle gave them to him."

"I wouldn't be surprised. Jessie should have known he couldn't print a thing like that about Marietta and stay in the same town with her old man. It's a wonder Mike didn't kill him."

"No great loss, if he had, I guess. Anyhow, we're better off without that column of his. It gave some people an awful kick, but still and all, it caused a heap of grief to many people."

A week after the accident, Tony and Gordon had their beds restored to them, and congratulated themselves at this evidence that things were moving along. 'Not to mention that an army cot is no bed of roses,' remarked Tony. They were in the outer office checking the depositions Gordon always made of his treatment of accident cases. It saved a lot of time, and cancelled out many possible errors, should the case be involved in a lawsuit. Once it was all down on paper, they could clear their minds of the details.

When they were through, Miss Hall asked Tony whether he didn't want to finish the letter he had been dictating last week. He stared at her. "What letter?"

"You were dictating one to Boone Hospital."

"Oh." Tony felt as if a hundred years had passed since that afternoon when he knew he was leaving Westwood Hospital. He looked at Gordon. The older man looked back, smiling.

"You ought to let them know, Tony," he said quietly.

"Yes, sir. I—everything seems to be different, somehow. The accident, the way people act.... And it's been such a great fight."

"So you'd rather stay," Gordon said.

"If you'll let me, sir, I'd like to stay. And—keep fighting."

Gordon looked away a moment. "You can stay," he said gruffly.

Tony knew Gordon was moved by his genuine desire to stay. They could call him Galahad for it, but he knew what he wanted. And he hadn't had to think twice about making this decision. His life was here, his heart was in this work. Money.... position? Ah, but this was something that really counted!

He dictated a short letter of thanks and refusal to Boone Hospital, apologizing for the delay. Flannery came in while he was doing this, and nodded cheerfully when Gordon told him of the decision. "He's staying because he likes to work thirty-six hours at a whack," Gordon said.

"It wasn't only that," Tony said happily. "It was—oh, knowing the people, and their kids, and in a way being a part of it."

"I knew you'd stay all along," Tom said. "Gordon

couldn't have gone through with it either, especially after—we've all seen what a trivial thing it was. And the town has, too.'

The telephone rang. Miss Hall answered and nodded to Tony. He took the instrument...listened...set it down. His face worked. "Hospital's full to the brim," he choked. "And Garms calls from Warwick to say that he's bringing in a confinement—he thinks it's *twins*." He laid his head on the desk and laughed. Miss Hall laughed, too.

"You're both hysterical," Gordon snorted.

Tony wiped his eyes. "Try it—it feels swell. I'll match you—your bed or mine."

"I never gamble," said Gordon virtuously. "I'll go to bed while you're having the twins."

He was out the next afternoon, late, on the country road he had taken the first day he had gone exploring in Darcey. It was a raw, blustery day, squally and grey by turns. When he reached the underpass it began to rain, and he smiled at the repetition of this, too: Was it his imagination playing, or had the coincidence really occurred—was it Marietta, in that same red dress and with that same vivid smile, pulling up? Heavens, it was. Really it was. Like something in a fairy tale.

"Want a ride, Doctor?" she was leaning out laughing, holding the car door open. He jumped in and hugged her. "Now, now. Don't be so impulsive." She slammed the door, started the car, shot away—the identical jolt!

"You're a darling," he said, irrelevantly.

"And you're nice."

"You used to think so."

"I think so more now than I ever did, Tony."

"Do you mean that, Marietta? Do you, or are you just teasing me? After all the cat and mouse games you've played with me, I ought to cut you cold, or give you a beating, instead of sitting here and making love to you all over again. Like a sap."

"Don't make love to me, Tony," said Marietta gently. "I don't want to start that all over again. You see...Oh, I don't know. For a few days maybe, or so, I thought I was in love with you. But it wasn't the real thing, Tony. I knew it—afterward."

"Was that why you stood me up on New Year's Day?"

"Partly. Yes, I guess that's about the explanation."

"What do you mean, partly?"

"Oh, I don't know, Tony. I...It's just that maybe I got tired, suddenly, of running away from myself."

"From yourself? I thought it was Darcey you wanted to run away from."

Marietta considered. "Yes. that too....By the way, I hear you're leaving."

"Marietta. If—if I did leave, would you—You've said so often all you wanted was to get out of Darcey. Would you go with me?"

She laughed. "No, Tony. I wouldn't. I found out that wasn't all I wanted. I still want to leave, almost more than anything else. But—not with just anybody, Tony. Not even with you. You see, Tony, I don't love you. I didn't think that mattered much. I thought that love was... oh, ninety per cent just sex. I'm pretty sure now that it isn't."

"What made you change your mind?" he asked curiously. "Me?"

"In a way." Tony winced, and she laid a compassionate hand on his arm. "Tony, you don't understand, and I can't make you understand—now. It wasn't your fault and not altogether mine, I think. You needed me, and I'm not sorry for what happened. Maybe I needed you, just to help me face the sort of thing I've been doing. For years I've been proving to Darcey that I didn't give a damn what Darcey thought. So what? That's not a career. Worse, it's just another way of being a Darceyite. Well, I'm through with that—for keeps, I hope."

Tony grinned ruefully. "Yes, and through with me apparently."

Marietta sighed.

"But, Marietta, just because you've reformed—"

Marietta's jaw clicked. "Reformed, nothing. I'm not a complete fool, and I haven't a nickel's worth of remorse for anything I've done. I've never been mean, and some day you'll thank your lucky stars for that, Tony McNeill. If I'd been mean, or a fool, I'd have married you out of hand and we'd have had a hell of a time for the rest of our lives."

"I'd have chanced that," said Tony obstinately. "How about seeing you again—say, Sunday?"

Marietta pulled up in front of the hospital and stopped without turning into the drive. Tony flushed, remembering an earlier occasion of this kind.

"I'm sorry, Tony. I'm going up to Columbus over the week-end."

"Next Sunday, then?"

"No! Tony, you're a big fool, and I'm still a little fond of you, and—oh, hell!" Viciously she slammed the car into gear and raced up the long grey stretch of Westwood Avenue.

Tony stood looking after her, rubbing his head in bewilderment. She had looked as if she were going to cry, he reflected dazedly. Oh, hell, himself! He walked up the steps to the hospital.

Gus Engel, editor, copy writer, and star reporter of the *Darcey Daily News*, surveyed the smudged galleys on his

desk. "Aged Negress Disappears." That was a good head. *House found deserted. Believed fled to escape indictment.* Okay, too. Grey enough to excite anybody. He read the story through, correcting the typographical errors, and making sure for the third time that there was nothing in it that a "family newspaper" wasn't supposed to print. What about *midwife*? Was it all right to call her that? He wished he could think of some other word. Well, anyway, it just appeared once, and he wasn't featuring the story anyway. Inside page, half a column.

He finished the proof corrections, took the story upstairs to the press. The pressman glanced at it. "Okay, Gus," he said. "Listen . . . do you know anything more about that story than it says here?"

"Why, Felix! Whatever makes you think I would? I'm a newspaperman, you know. Everything I know I put in the paper—like hell."

"Then you do know something about it?"

"Why do you want to know?"

"Oh, it just looked kind of fishy to me, that's all. There's been all that talk of bringing her to trial. And you say here that they found the summons on her dining-room table. 'Evidently she had been frightened by this, and had made her escape.' What I mean is, would she go off like that, and leave everything in her house just as is, clothes and everything, and the doors wide open to the winds?"

"I'll tell you, Felix. All I know is that it looks fishy to me, too. And that she said she'd talk, and talk plenty, if they brought her to trial. She didn't want to do any disappearing, as far as I can gather."

"Hmmm. I had a kind of hunch about that. Who do you think would . . . disappear her, Gus?"

"I don't know, but I guess I have about the same ideas on that subject as you have, Felix. I've been running this paper for fifteen years, and by this time I think I know who runs Darcey politics, and what for."

"Supposing she—the body, I mean—turns up? Somebody's liable to find it."

"Yeah. Some farmer kid, or something. I know. But I have a notion that it will probably be a long, long time before that happens—if it does. And then . . ."

"They won't be able to identify her. Remains of an unknown female, aged sixty or thereabouts, and so forth. Not a clue."

"That's about it, I guess. I guess it's a closed story, all right. I'll put it in the morgue," and he grinned sourly.

Downstairs, Gus sat down in his ancient swivel chair. Lighted his pipe, leaned back, with his hands behind his head. Funny, the way things turned out. Jessie gone, good riddance to him. Mattie gone, ditto to her. A mere murder, he thought sardonically, and they all lived happily ever

after. Whale of a story in a small town, but you can't print that. Only thing a man could do was to put it in a novel. He pulled on his pipe, and went off in reverie, vaguely outlining the plot of the great story he was always figuring but never—like every other scribbler in the country—got around to writing.

The Women's Club, the Country Club, the Christmas and New Year's balls, and, at the other end of the scale, Cypress Flats: that wasn't the whole of Darcey, although the social elite of the town frequently seemed to act on that assumption.

Suspicion that there was another Darcey had been growing in Tony's mind for some time: it was sharpened by the sudden ebbing of the tide of social ostracism which, before the bus accident, had threatened to overwhelm him.

"It doesn't make sense, Tom," Tony declared one evening as he and Flannery were raiding Judith's icebox for a late supper. "A week or so ago, my name was mud in this town, and Gordon was glad to see me go even though he liked my work and needed me. But now nobody seems to care. Of course, the accident made a difference. But even so . . ."

Flannery smoked silently for a moment.

"The collective memory is short, Tony, even shorter than the individual memory. That's both good and bad. But in your case you had some friends you didn't know about. Didn't count on."

"Friends?"

"Sure. The fellows in overalls that come in from the farms to the Saturday clinic—their women and kids, too. They like you, Tony. If Mike Doyle hadn't given Jessie that pair of shiners, I think one of your farmer friends would have cared for the matter."

Tony looked at Tom, a frown creasing his forehead. "What on earth are you talking about?"

"Remember a farmer called Clem Bradley?"

"No." Tony rubbed the back of his neck. "Woods full of Bradleys," he admitted, "but Clem . . . no."

"Lucky for you the woods are full of Bradleys. And Clem is the first of all these. Know that big dairy farm out west of town—brick silos, and white barns?"

"Yes. Yes, I do, Tom. Fine place."

"And you know Clem. too. Big, lanky fellow. Looks as if his clothes needed another nail to hold them up. Slow to talk, but thinks deep. And plenty. Progressive guy, for all his hound-dog looks. Got two sons in Ag college. One graduated this year, I think. Anyway, Clem's the rural boss around here. He's the one behind these electrical associations the farmers have."

"What?" Tony was laughing.

"All the farmers band together to get electrical power.

These dairy fellows are great on organisation. Found they got nowhere too fast without it—cutting each other's throats on cream prices, and so forth. Now they do fine. Got community marketing system. Test their cows for t.b. and Bang's disease. That's where you come in."

"Me? Not as veterinary, by any chance?"

"Naw. They have their vet. But it's what gave Clem the idea."

"Would it be too much to ask you what idea?"

"Co-op medicine."

"Oh."

Tom beat his fist softly upon the table top. "Look, Tony—for God's sake keep an open mind. You're too young to . . ."

"All right. She's open. Go on. Try to tell me that this Bradley is standing ready to set me up as a hospital group. Or something."

"Look, Tony. And the saints give me patience. What I want to get across is that these farmers around here know how to think and act co-operatively. They've solved some of their problems that way. Among those problems has been the one of healthy, profitable stock. Now, this Bradley—I said he was a deep thinker—can't see why the same thing wouldn't be good for the farmers and their families. He's talked to me about it. I gave him some of the literature we get, and he likes the set-up. He'd like mighty well for his farmers to be able to buy some medicine from Westwood Hospital. Now, do you see? So much a year, so much medical care and hospitalization."

"Ye-es. But why me?"

"Because they know you. These farmers, their wives, and kids. They know you, and like your polite ways and your lovely bedside manner."

"All right, Tom. Get on with it. They like me and the clinic. You mentioned Jessie?"

"Yes. Bradley saw his attack as a danger to this scheme he's taking on. Made him pretty mad—those deep guys get awful mad, son."

"Do they really?"

"Really they do. In fact, Bradley put the farmers on record as to how they felt by telling Jessie off up on Main Street, aided somewhat by the stock whip he had in his fist. People like to see justice done the way he did it. That, and the bus accident . . ."

Tony nodded. "Does Gordon know about this idea of the farmers' buying medical service at Westwood?"

Flannery shook his head. "The chief is a born dictator. He'll have to be worked on a good deal before he's ready for anything of the sort. He reads a lot. He knows the snags this thing has run into in other places—the blue-eyed Swedes are great organizers, but their path hasn't been too

rosy. There was a frightful row in Oklahoma when the farmers set up their own co-op. hospital. Lawsuits, expulsion from the medical society—the usual hullabaloo. Not pleasant. Of course, the chief doesn't care a damn about medical politics. But he cares a whooping lot about medical standards, and he'll have to be as sure of non-interference in such a scheme."

"You know, he's right, Tom. What would farmers know about medicine?"

"Not a thing. That's the beauty of it. They know they don't know anything. And in this community, they think that Gordon is the Allah of medicine, and you're his prophet."

"What are you?"

Tom shrugged. "In-between guy. They're scared of the chief, but they can talk to me. *Everybody* talks to me."

"Have you talked to the chief?"

"Time isn't ripe. Things can stew until Bradley gets his people lined up. Even progressive Missouri farmers move slowly. Meanwhile, you might study up on the subject, and get to know these farmers who come to your clinic. They are very real people. I wouldn't be surprised if they aren't the ones who make Darcey a living, struggling community. It's medicine's job to serve the will to live, not merely of the individual, but of the community as an organic whole. You couldn't seek a brighter grail, Tony, m'lad, than to dedicate yourself to this service."

Chapter Twelve

BY THE end of February, the human debris which the bus accident had deposited in Westwood was pretty well cleared away. Death had claimed only three of Tony's charges; eight had left the hospital; two were still convalescing slowly—they would leave Westwood as cripples, but Tony, searching his conscience, could tell himself that Westwood had done well. But for Westwood—above all but for Gordon's uncanny surgical skill—it might have been a lot worse.

The flood-tide of intense activity which had threatened to overwhelm the hospital was now receding. Yet Tony was not able to relax. During the period of highest tension, Tony had acquired the habit of disregarding fatigue, and had noted more than once that he had thereby released new and unsuspected levels of energy, so that apparently overwork carried no immediate physical penalties. It had also served as an anodyne for his personal miseries, which he had kept to himself; until finally there came a moment of illumination when he suddenly realized

that he didn't have any authentic miseries to confide, even if there had been at hand an acceptable confidant.

He had been in love. His girl had jilted him, treated him badly. The happiness that had seemed within his grasp had been snatched away, brutally, unreasonably. Theoretically, he, Tony, should, he supposed, be an embittered man, limping through life with an incurable psychic wound. . . . Except that it just wasn't so. Concerning Marietta, the only emotion which he could bring to consciousness was a certain feeling of emptiness, which was balanced by occasional unromantic spasms of relief at having emerged from the deep water in which he had been floundering. Since his hospital duties at the moment didn't supply enough work to sate his restlessness, and since he still recoiled from the idea of seeking social diversions, Tony decided to put some of his energy into writing—to Breaker, whose last two notes had gone unanswered.

'Dear Bill . . . ' he wrote, late one night while the March wind, howling in from the prairie, accented by its very bluster his feeling of security, warm within four walls. The grip of winter was broken; soon the new landscape would awaken.

"Dear Bill: Sorry I've been so slow about writing. We've been through the wars out here. School-bus accident—thirty kids; yours truly has done more surgery in a month than he ever expected to do in a year. On top of that, hell to pay with the town biddies when we started taking routine Wassermanns. And just for good measure, I stick my neck out trying to clean up the local abortion racket. Sure, I've been to the wars. A little of the old woman trouble too, but that's over, thank God. When you come down to it, a woman is only a woman, but a man's first Cæsarean is something to write home about . . ." Nuts. That wouldn't do. Tear it up. That Kipling piece was bad enough in the original, without burlesquing it. Start again.

"Dear Bill: Have been too busy to write. We've been through hell out here. It's over now." No, cross that out. "It's more or less over now, or at least I'm getting rather used to it. I suppose a man has to go through just so much hell before he begins to grow up . . ." God! What kind of a schoolboy philosopher was he turning into? Breaker would howl. No, tear it up.

"Dear Bill: Too busy to write. Sorry. See you soon, I hope. Lots to talk about. Incidentally, if you call me 'Annie' again—or 'Galahad' for that matter—I'll knock your block off. Honestly, Bill—but wait till I see you."

There, that would do. Sign and mail it.

In the hall, he encountered Flannery just coming off the ward after a tour of night duty.

"Hi, Galahad!"

Tony's face showed his displeasure, and Flannery's intuition was quick to respond.

"Lay off the Galahad, eh. Tony? So be it. You've been horsed around plenty during the past two months—don't think I don't realize it. How about dropping over to the house for a nightcap? I'll drive you back."

Tony had a momentary impulse of gratitude. He'd like to talk to somebody, and maybe Tom would curb that cynical tongue of his for once. But Flannery's next sentence sent him again into retreat.

"Seen Marietta lately?"

"No."

Tom regarded him keenly. "Sorry, Tony. You'll see her, I suspect. And when you do..."

Tom placed a fatherly hand on Tony's shoulder, meanwhile singing in a light tenor. "*Malbrook s'en va t'en guerre.*"

"Say," muttered Tony, "what's all that about?"

"Nothing, Tony. Skip it. See you to-morrow."

And Flannery was off down the hall, leaving Tony scratching his head, in bewilderment, mingled with a tightening sense of renewed apprehension. Had Tom seen Marietta? They had once been intimate, he knew—how intimate he could only guess. Had Marietta talked? About him? What had she said? . . . Oh, hell, forget it. Whatever it was, he guessed he could take it.

Tony deposited his letter in the outgoing mail basket and went to bed.

It was the next day that Tony met Mike Doyle on the street. Regardless of his relations with Marietta, it was impossible to be anything but kind and courteous to Mike.

They were glad to see each other, and went into a restaurant for a cup of coffee together. Mike deplored the fact that Tony didn't seem to come out to the house so often lately. Tony explained how busy he was.

"But I'd like you to come out this next Sunday afternoon," Mike said urgently. "We're having a little celebration. I want you there."

Tony was cornered—for many weeks he had spent every Sunday afternoon and evening with Marietta. Sunday was his half-day. Mike knew this. Not for worlds would Tony have hurt the old gentleman with a casual refusal. It was equally impossible fully to explain why he had stopped coming to the house. "I'll be there," he agreed. If it were a *celebration*, there'd be a crowd. He'd go, and try to be decent. Cool. That's what he'd be. Cool and courteous. Hadn't he decided to face his problems? Then, the thing to do was to *face* them.

Sunday, he left the hospital at three o'clock. He found half a dozen cars in the Doyle driveway—it was, truly, a party. Very unlike Mrs. Doyle to entertain on Sunday. As soon as he stepped in the hall, Tony knew that the "celebration" was a wedding. There were vases of white roses set about, and he could see the dining-room table set with silver and glass and a three-tiered cake. The guests had that fluttery air of expectant hysteria which accompanies weddings. Mrs. Doyle came to greet him; she wore grey velvet, and a corsage of pink roses.

"Dear Tony!" she said softly.

Tony was in a funk. He only hoped he concealed the worst of it. There were so many eyes—curious, sly. He moved about in a daze, speaking to people without realizing that he had made a sound. He couldn't very well shout, "Who's the bride? And the groom?"

For a panicky minute he wondered if it were possible that Marietta had executed a sudden change of front and roped him to his own wedding—oh, but that was utter nonsense.

Slowly, his dazed mind began to realize that this was Bobby's wedding. There was Frank Kraft, looking wretched in a stiff collar. The girls in the room all gushed over him, girls who all looked alike. Why did they? Their faces all had that same bald, naked look. He fancied it was a matter of their eyes—they tortured their eyebrows into thin arcs of continuous surprise; they all had that same air of constant and vacuous amazement.

Still suffering from his first bewilderment, Tony established himself in the recess of the bay window. From this harbour, he could hear the talk and laughter. The jokes made to, and about, Frank. Darcey humour was always sophomoric. Brazen, repetitious, without subtlety. To-day it sickened Tony to listen to the same poor jokes repeated again and again. Why in thunder hadn't he stayed at the hospital?

Mr. Leigh shared Tony's refuge. Mr. Leigh was small, and meek, and deaf. He had a ripe case of halitosis, and a bulbous, inflamed nose which had always excited Tony's professional interest. As a companion, just now, he was ideal. He'd let Tony think in peace.

Someone began to play the piano and a woman to sing "O, Promise Me," breathily, and a little flat. The groups in the room shifted. The minister took up his stand before the fireplace, Mr. and Mrs. Doyle to his right, Frank Kraft to his left. The music changed to Lohengrin, and every one looked expectantly towards the stairs. Presently Marietta and Barbara came down together. They had small hats tilted over their noses; they carried flowers. Bobby's were white. Their faces were made up extravagantly. Somehow this lavish display of rouge and lipstick

seemed offensive on a bride and her attendant. Marietta's face looked as hard as an enamelled plate. She was obviously under a strain, and not well.

Tony listened, unheeding, to the service. Afterward, his memory could recall that it had lacked the familiar raciness which enriches the back pages of the Book of Common Prayer. Fornication was not to be mentioned in the Doyle living-room.

Tony recalled Marietta's reason for any eventual marriage between Bobby and Frank. He felt no shame to find that he was looking at the bride speculatively. Despite himself, his mind did a persistent, mocking, unspoken obbligo to the preacher's solemn periods. Frank and Bobby stood before the man patiently. This was a convention to which, for some reason, they had found it expedient to subscribe. Mr. Doyle's face was grave; Mrs. Doyle's, sweet and wistful.

What, Tony thought, of the parents of these two girls? What of Mrs. Doyle? Surely she had heard tales of wickedness among modern youth. But hers was a sugary optimism. She could not believe that a pretty girl could be a *bad* girl. (For that matter, Tony reflected, just what was a *bad* girl?)

And Mike? His was a wise knowledge of the world. He knew that, as a world, it was evil and immoral. He had learned this thoroughly in his rise through the levels of railroad work. He knew also that his girls were oases of purity in this desert of sin. He'd knock the man down who said different!

Tony was swept by a real, physical nausea. He wished, dreadfully, that he were near enough to the door to escape. The room was stifling; heat and perfume, flowers and humanity, pressed against him with a fetid breath. He leaned hard against the window frame, pressed his hands against the cold glass.

The minister was praying. The guests stood with heads pliously downbent. Barbara smoothed the velvet of her frock down over her hips; her face was bored. Oh, it was all shockingly wrong! A marriage should be joyous, a bride should radiate a dewy innocence and expectancy. Then Tony remembered the cynical observation his father had once made to the effect that there would be more virgin women if it weren't for men. That was true, of course. Though girls were sometimes at fault for their share—often it was the girl who overbalanced a situation. And often not—Tony had the grace to blush at the pharisaism of his own thought. Too bad every one could not be as good as Tony McNeill!

The minister's voice quieted on a rolling A-men. Immediately the chorus of exclamations rose shrilly. The guests surged about the bride and groom, the same jokes

lifted their shopworn heads. Tony was carried along on the tide of chattering humanity. Almost at once, Marietta had her hand on his arm, was pressing against him, talking, smiling. Why? Was this merely for the public record, or had she changed again? There was something close to pathos in her clinging gestures, and again he had the feeling that she was not well.

Tony went through the forms. He even kissed Barbara, and smiled at the ribald jest somebody made. He found himself out in the dining-room, eating chicken salad, drinking coffee and a glass of wine. Marietta stayed beside him, murmuring outrageous comments on the guests. Still that hard facial masque—her comments were bitter rather than funny. But Marietta, in any mood, still had the power to arouse him physically. Blond lace, like gossamer, clung to her full white bosom. The sight of it—its daintiness, its inadequacy—did things to Tony's male nerve ganglions. He set his plate down on the table with a thump. "I'm going home," he announced.

"Let's drive to Columbus, and——"

He glared at her, his cheek twitching. "I'm going home."

Marietta shrugged and turned away. Tony found his hat and coat, made a limping excuse to Mrs. Doyle, and strode out of the house. His long legs drove like pistons; he felt the blood hot in his cheeks. He went the long, back way home, lest he meet somebody, and need speak.

The tall clock in the office struck seven as Tony entered the hospital. Time for the evening check-up—not his job to-night, since he was still technically off duty. He wished he weren't. It would be good to be back on the ward—help to get the taste of that afternoon's doing out of his mouth. Come to think of it, he had an easy alibi. Tom Flannery's son Jack was in room eight with a broken leg. Jack would be glad to see him, and it would be fun to talk to a decent kid for a change—he'd had enough of grown-ups for one day.

Still big-eyed and white—the leg had been set only the night before—Jack had come out of his fright sufficiently, however, to welcome Tony with enthusiasm.

He had a grievance to tell him—he'd ridden to the hospital in the ambulance, but John Oliver hadn't hit the gong a single time. Tony promised that things should be different when he was taken home.

Tony explained to Jack the principles of the fracture frame. He told him about the children he had seen at Shriners'. Dozens of them—one broken bone should be easy for Jack. And another thing Tony thought of—he'd show Jack how to knit a sweater such as the Canadian Mounties made. They liked to do red ones—Tony knew

exactly how. Together, he and Jack, they'd get this leg business over in no time.

He gave the boy a sedative—there was real pain all right—and turned him over to the night nurse. She was grateful. "Will you come up early to-morrow, Doctor, and give him his oil?"

"Now, listen, Geller! Get his father to do your dirty work."

Miss Geller laughed. Dr. Flannery, she said, had gone all to pieces last night—wouldn't even stay in the operating room while the leg was set. "Jack's, crazy about you—he'll take even castor oil from you."

"Oh, Tony!" Gordon had entered while Tony and the nurse were talking. "How about making a trip to-morrow? The Priest baby—remember?—I've arranged to get her into Shriners."

"But——" Tony started to protest. "I'd like to go, of course—chance to see Breaker and everybody. But are you sure you won't need me here?"

"Nonsense. Take the noon train. Draw on the desk for what money you'll need. Stay over a couple of days if you like. We'll phone you if we get a rush. You're looking a bit seedy. Right, Miss Geller? Little vacation will do you good."

So Tony had three days at Boone. Breaker greeted him with a shout of pleasure. The staff doctors were friendly, and Tony enjoyed shamelessly the kick of revisiting, in his new role as an established surgeon, the operating rooms where he had worked as an interne. Of confidences between him and Breaker, however, there were strangely few. Tony found that he didn't want to talk about Marietta. He did mention his encounter with Marietta's brother, "Stinky" Doyle, the former Boone medic who had left in disgrace. To Tony's surprise, Breaker expressed sympathetic concern over the fate of their former associate.

"What's he doing now? Did he say?"

"Nothing much. Lousy compensation work mostly, I imagine."

Breaker sighed. "Probably. Rotten luck. Doyle was a good man, you know."

"What?" Tony could scarcely believe his ears.

"Oh, I knew what the dean said. I remember how everybody pretended to be shocked and virtuous, including you, Tony, and me. But I remember one thing you didn't hear. Hendrickson—the old bird that left last year to go to the Institute—Hendrickson heard some of us discussing the dean's speech in the corridor and damned near bit our heads off. I can hear that hoarse snarl of his yet: 'You bunch of hypocritical cubs! But for the grace of

God I'll bet every one of you might be standing in Doyle's shoes right now."

"Hendrickson said that? But what did he mean? It wasn't true!"

Breaker shrugged. "Okay, Galahad. Beg pardon, Annie. Speak for yourself. All I know is that ever since then I've been pretty careful about making sweeping judgments about anybody. Take Doyle. What did he do, after all? Gets his girl in trouble—sure, he should have been careful. Then it's up to him to marry her and he's willing, but she isn't. Then, rather than see her go to a back-street abortionist—say, what's the matter with you? You're looking sick!"

Tony had, in fact, turned white as a sheet.

"Nothing." Tony rose, opened a window, and felt better. But for the grace of God . . .

Breaker was now all concern, got him a stiff drink of brandy, and drove him to the station. Tony was silent and reserved, except for the moment of parting when he wrung Breaker's hand with an intensity that caused the latter to gape with astonishment.

But for the grace of God . . . A dozen times on the way back to Darcey, Tony attempted to discipline the whirling confusion of his mind by telling himself that there was no reason for his apprehension. What if he had acted like a hypocrite and a Pharisee, as Breaker, more or less inadvertently, had made him realize? Very well. He'd treat Arthur Doyle decently if he saw him again. As for himself, he'd never . . . But what of Marietta? Nonsense, she would have told him long since. Why should he be imagining such things? Marietta had seemed overtense and a little ill at her sister's wedding. That was all, literally all, until Breaker's talk and his own realization that he had been self-righteous about Arthus Doyle, had sent his imagination careering over the landscape. He must take himself in hand. And he'd call up Marietta, just to be sure. If there was music to be faced, he'd face it—nonsense, there he was, off again in imaginary heroics. How Marietta would laugh if she ever knew his state of mind!

By the time the train drew into Darcey, Tony had achieved a tolerable state of composure. He had been overtired, he told himself. The late parties with Breaker and his friends, the hangover of exhaustion from the arduous days and nights that followed the bus accident. Forget it. His greeting to John Oliver and the telephone girl was cheerful. Any messages? Yes, Doctor Gordon wanted to see him in his office . . . Naturally, he reflected, to hear his report concerning the Priest baby.

Possibly there was something perfunctory in the chief's greeting. Or was he again imagining things? "All set,"

he started briskly. "They say there is a fifty-fifty chance of complete recovery."

"Oh, yes, the Priest baby. Looks good, you say? Very competent orthopaedic set-up they've got now. Yes. Ah—er—Tony, would you mind going through these case records this evening and filing them? Nothing very complicated. Won't require discussion. The last one can go into a closed envelope. Thanks. Flannery's on to-night; won't need you until morning."

Gordon's nod unmistakably signified dismissal. Tony stared in surprise, but the chief's expression remained blank.

Alone in his room, Tony speculated:

Had something happened in his absence? Had he slipped up on something? The case records wouldn't require discussion, Gordon had said. Then why the hurry about filing them this evening? He'd better have a quick look . . .

The first case recorded the miscarriage of Mrs. Saunders. Well, the pregnancy had been ectopic and Tony had made a prognosis of miscarriage. Gordon had shown him this report because the case was one of Tony's. He would go in to see her right away.

The second case had to do with the Stout baby, a marasmus case. There was to have been a consultation with a Kansas City pediatrician Saturday. This was the report. Tony read it with casual interest. It was Flannery's case, though Tony knew both the father and mother, gay members of the young married crowd. He smiled at Gordon's comments—written in longhand—Gordon's clear judgment and salty tongue occasionally made fine reading of a history.

He turned over the sheet of pink paper. One more. Gordon said this one would be closed—that meant, usually, death. Such cases were put out of the way into special filing cases, only used as a matter of research and reference by the staff doctors.

Tony poured out a cup of tea and glanced casually at the top one of several sheets of paper that were clipped together. His heart caught, plunged madly in his breast. The name . . . Marietta had come here! Had come to Gordon himself! She *was* sick then. And she hadn't told him. But she had come to Gordon and then—Why had he brought this thing to Tony?

Tony read the papers hurriedly, his breath struggling in his throat. There were two sheets of paper covered by Gordon's *comments*. Written in Gordon's fine, copper-plate handwriting. Tony read what he had to say. Turned back and read the report again, as if his very life depended upon his knowing every detail. As perhaps it did.

Marietta, the data showed, was pregnant. Ugh! His

brain storm had been a real premonition, then. Term was fixed for the third week in August. Tony looked hard at the calendar over his desk. Well, that fitted, too. Condition, so and so. Measurements, so and so. Gordon's prognosis was for a normal and successful delivery at term.

Now, he had come again to the *comments*. What had Gordon meant by giving this paper to Tony, telling him that the cases would not need discussion, that the last—Marietta's—was to be closed? It meant, of course, that Gordon knew about Marietta's pregnancy. But had he meant to warn Tony, or to reassure him? Perhaps his meaning had been stronger—threatening, even. What, then, was Tony's next move? What did Gordon expect him to do? Could he be counted on to reveal his expectations more clearly? Tony thought, with a little sigh of relief, that he might well be. Gordon, displeased, never let his victim dwell long in any doubt of his anger. If he planned to say anything specific to Tony about this affair, he'd say it. Tony, at least, need waste no worry on that count.

Gordon's comments were pithy. Miss D. had come to him, by her admittance, because of his reputation for keeping his mouth shut. In making her application for examination, she had mentioned a mole on her cheek. She had this mole, but when Doctor Gordon was examining it, she had also confessed pregnancy, and made a tentative suggestion that the fetus might be removed while she was also being deprived of the mole. Doctor Gordon had refused to entertain the suggestion. Tony smiled grimly to imagine just how flatly Gordon had refused.

Miss D.'s desire for privacy, as well as her inclination towards abortion, would be understood. She was unmarried. She indicated that, while she knew the identity of the father, she had no intention of marrying same. Intercourse had not been virgin. Father, she inferred, would care financially for the child, but again he would not be asked. Insisted that she contemplated abortion. Doctor G. advised her to go elsewhere. If secrecy were an item with her, he advised her immediate departure from her home and the vicinity of friends. She indicated that she would follow his advice. Asked that the case be closed so far as W. Hospital and the chief surgeon were concerned. Paid her bill, and intimated that the hospital would hear no more of her case. Satisfaction mutual as to this course.

Tony imagined the interview Gordon had had with Marietta, and groaned aloud. Gordon knew. Marietta had not needed to "name" the father. How would Tony McNeill be able to face the chief again? How would he be able to explain? But Gordon had told him, quite definitely that he would not be asked to explain. These

cases would need "no discussion." It didn't look as if Gordon planned to have him on the carpet about the matter. Did Gordon, knowing that Tony would hold himself accountable, have some idea that the child might actually have some other father?

Tony left his tea cold in the cup, his cookies uneaten on his plate. He was feeling old and tired when he started for the office to file the histories. It was all very well for a man to decide to "face" a problem—the details of such a stand could be very difficult when they needed to be confronted. Tony wished that, ostrich-fashion, he might, for the next few days, hide from Gordon's keen, all-seeing blue eyes. He was feeling pretty small and mean, and must appear so to any one with the vision to judge his stature.

The reading lamp was burning in the office. Tom Flannery. Was he in on this, too?

"Hallo, Tony."

Again Tony's heart thumped, and his bones turned to jelly. Tom knew. He could see it in his face, drawn with that old contortion of pain that he had seen a time or two before during their acquaintance.

"You know—about this?" Tony pointed to the sealed envelope.

"Yes."

"She never told me! I didn't dream! I would have married her. All my money—she could have had the child—anything."

"Anything?"

"You mean . . ."

Flannery flicked the ash of his cigarette. "Would you have done what Gordon refused to do?"

Tony flushed, his entrails writhing in nausea.

"No."

Relentlessly, Flannery continued: "Do you love the woman, Tony? Would you have wanted a child by her?"

"Yes—no. I did in the beginning, at least I thought . . ."

Flannery shrugged, extinguished his cigarette, and smiled wearily.

"Yes. . . That's it. She doesn't want a child by you either, Tony."

"You—you talked to her?" A sudden suspicion flashed in Tony's feverish brain. "You—why did she—was it you—"

"No." Flannery's voice was sharp and a little contemptuous. "That was years ago, Tony."

Tony jumped to his feet. "I've got to see her. I've got to know. It's not fair. I'm not—I'm not a dirty mucker. I don't care what you think. Gordon either. Oh, I'll resign. I'll leave. Only let me . . ."

"Sit down, Tony."

The older man's tone admitted no argument. Tony obeyed. Deliberately, Flannery lighted a fresh cigarette, puffed, and continued.

"No, you're not a mucker, Tony. As a matter of fact, you're a rather exceptionally decent, clean chap. I know that. Gordon knows it. You know it yourself. You're a fool, of course, and professionally speaking you appear to have been less careful outside Westwood than in. Also, you haven't learned to carry your liquor very well."

Tony writhed at that. Flannery continued calmly.

"But in that respect, you're not exceptional. I don't judge you. Neither does Gordon. Gordon's a fool too. He's standing by, Tony. He's not ready to unload you. Not yet. He'd have had to, of course, but for a fortunate fact that I know but Gordon doesn't yet know."

Tony straightened and stared at his inquisitor. Flannery returned the stare, his lips twisted in a mirthless smile.

"An act of God, Tony. Somewhat abetted, I suspect, by the lady in question."

"You mean. . . Tom, for God's sake. . ."

"Marietta's in Boone, Tony. Miscarriage. The problem of medical ethics—the even more interesting moral and sociological problems—all solved." Flannery made a sweeping gesture.

"She left Gordon's office, hopped into her car, and drove—you know how she drives—straight for St. Louis. Took the back roads. The Ambulance found her in the ditch ten miles out. They phoned us—she had given our name—and I took the call."

"Ah!" Sheer anguish forced Tony's exclamation.

"Right. But she made it. On her own. As usual. The girl's got guts, Tony—or perhaps you hadn't noticed."

"I'm starting back now. I'll put a call in..." Tony's hand reached for the telephone.

"Wait a minute!" Flannery's voice was again peremptory. "I phoned half an hour ago. She'll be out in a week. She's Mike Doyle's daughter, you know. Constitution like a truck horse. If I were you, Tony—far be it from an old fool to offer a young fool advice but if I were you..."

"Yes, Tom, go ahead."

"I'd leave Marietta strictly alone from now on, assuming that you'll have any choice in the matter, which I doubt."

Tony nodded humbly. "Anything else, Tom?"

"Guess not. Oh, yes. Herbert called up. Matter of keeping his fences up. Very cordial. Wants you to lecture on the abortion problem in America at the next Medical Society meeting."

Tony gulped and waved a hand in feeble protest. Flannery roared with laughter. The ordeal was over, Tony real-

realised. He felt utterly limp, unable either to think or feel let alone share the cream of Flannery's jest. Observing him, Tom's face sobered and warmed again to a genuine if still faintly ironic compassion.

"Go to bed, Tony. It's over. And don't try to find the answer to it all. There isn't any except maybe—well, boys grow older, and girls too. And if they've died once or twice in the process of growing up, maybe it helps them to live a little better in the end. Good-night."

Chapter Thirteen

AS a physician, Tony was bound to have learned over and over again the curious paradox of extreme physical pain, which is the master of man's universe while it lasts, but, when it is over, leaves almost no residue of memory.

As a man, Tony was to learn that moral and spiritual suffering is much the same. If anything, Tony's conscience was over-developed; hence he was not quick to forgive himself. Nor was it easy for him to repair his shattered self-respect. He, Tony McNeill, that paragon of truth and decency, had let himself be pulled out of jam, for which he was at least equally responsible, by a girl whom he had once loved, who had turned to him vainly in her extremity (he had been blind; he had not understood), and who had then faced her ordeal alone. Now he was safe, protected alike by her indifference and by the silence of his two medical associates.

With this and similar self-flagellations, Tony tortured himself for some weeks after Marietta's departure from Darcey. He heard nothing from her directly. Indirectly, through a chance meeting with Mrs. Doyle, who seemed to have not the slightest suspicion of what had actually happened, he learned that Marietta after a brief stay at Boone—"mostly the shock, poor girl"—had gone to California to convalesce from her accident.

These nightly bouts with his conscience did something to Tony. They tooled new lines about the brow and mouth. They brought a certain maturity to the eyes.

But a man cannot keep himself on the rack indefinitely, or even very long... Spring came to Darcey—not trippingly but with an almost sudden descent of green upon the flat landscape, and a swift lengthening of the days. Almost before he knew it, it was summer, and there was only work to think of and the intolerable heat.

Beginning in May—lasting until the middle of August—Darcey thermometers seldom went below 90 degrees, day or night. They frequently mounted to 110 or 112, even, on two occasions, to 114 degrees. There was no rain. Not even

a small, fleecy cloud to offer respite from the sun's glare. A hot, searing wind blew by day; at night it fell, and not a leaf stirred. Metal surfaces were as hot as a griddle to the touch. Lawns and gardens baked to a flat, lifeless brown. The farm lands about Darcey lay like bleached bones in the sun. Lean, gaunt cattle clustered around empty ponds, snuffing at the wide cracks in the grey, dried mud.

Proud trees, which had grown for a hundred years, sickened and died. In July, the dusty ground lay as littered with leaves as if it had been November. The water in the town reservoir shrank away from its high banks. People who had them uncovered old wells and used the water for their flowers and shrubs. Flannery had six typhoid cases and published warnings in the newspaper. Milk should be pasteurized, water boiled.

There was no place to swim, because if the reservoir went dry the town would need the lake's brackish water to drink. A big church burned to the ground for lack of water pressure. People were asked to bathe in four inches of water. Darcey was too hot to make the obvious jokes.

Aside from the typhoid, there wasn't much sickness—there were no insects, people lived healthily on fruit and ice cream, wore little or no clothing. Cots were set out in yards at night, bedsteads were moved into the open. There wasn't even dew. The townspeople looked brown and thin and tired.

The few patients the hospital had were kept as comfortable as possible—rooms darkened, sponge baths ordered every two hours. Where a case was bad, an electric fan could be set in motion behind a tub of ice.

In July, Gordon departed for a six weeks' period of study and consultation at John Hopkins, leaving Flannery in charge.

Tony had some surgery, but not more than he could comfortably and assuredly handle. He worked tirelessly through this inferno, and was able to write humorously to Gordon about it. "We've all died and gone to Hell. Yesterday the mercury went down to 98 and we called it a cold wave. We can't take temperatures. A fever of 105 would induce goose pimples. No one wears underwear any more. I can't stand a belt, nor my wrist watch. Flannery has a diabetic who says it's so hot she can't wear her false teeth. I'm spending my spare time in a yacht chair, reading *Anthony Adverse*. It's a swell book but very heavy on my belly."

Tony stayed pretty close to the hospital. It was as cool a place as there was in town. Occasionally he went out to Flannery's to listen to the noise some of the harder young married people were making, under the illusion that the group would develop into an orchestra. Tony had his

doubts about that, but it was rather fun to listen to their racket. Now and then he could be persuaded to sing.

Infrequently, he went to call upon Carolyn. Sometimes they took the family sedan and drove down the highway a short distance, but the air currents thus stirred were hot ones. Tony would buy Carolyn an ice-cream cone, eat two himself, take her home, and be back at the hospital by nine o'clock.

It was virtuous and it was very dull. The whole town seemed bewitched, held in a stupor of heat and inactivity. No one made one gesture, took a single step, even spoke, except where necessary. Tony sat through the canvas covering of his yacht chair, and had Asy replace it. He declared that his back was developing a permanent arch from constant sitting in the thing. He prayed for something to happen—anything.

His prayer was granted. Shortly after Gordon returned, in mid-August, the Darcey Bank failed. The crash shook the foundations of every home and business in town. Within Darcey, the bank stood for money, for currency itself. Now that it had failed, the economic world rocked. The bank's doors were locked and curtained. A piece of typed paper fluttered on the grilled entrance. The townpeople gathered in the streets outside; farmers drove to town and stood speculatively about. Old people, their savings gone, huddled in their homes and contemplated disaster. Young people declared they were glad they had spent their money instead of saving it.

For the first startled hours, the town as a whole fostered a hope that Banker Taylor would straighten things out, would make the losses good. Late that first day, he came down to the bank, and hope died helplessly. Banker Taylor no longer wore the pink rose in his buttonhole—things were black indeed for Darcey. That rose had distinguished him, winter and summer, as a banker and financier. Without it, he was like any other man.

Darcey had always been proud of Jim Taylor and his bank. His word had been financial law in the town just as his wife's had been decisive in matters of culture and social deportment. The town had held him aloft on a pillar of business acumen and resource. Now the hands which had raised him pulled him to earth and rubbed filth into his person and name.

He was accused of every banking wrong, big and petty. Some of these things he had done. He had, no doubt, lent the bank's money on inadequate security. The banks held numerous mortgages on homes and business far beyond their possible value. Jim Taylor had not been one to refuse money to a friend. Such a practice had never been good banking. Now these same friends were the first to condemn him. Too, it was charged that a favoured few of his

friends had been tipped off to withdraw their money during the last days of the month. A serious charge, this, if it could be proven.

"He's a rascal," Gordon declared.

"I'd hate to see a friend of Tony's go to jail," Tom said wickedly. Tony looked up from the struggling rabbit in his hands. He'd felt mildly distressed, knowing the Taylors as long—and as well, after a fashion—as he had done.

"He won't go to jail," Gordon declared.

"I've heard enough about Jim Taylor on the streets of Darcey to put ten men in jail," Tom argued. "Tony, are you going to anæsthetize that beast, or strangle it to death?"

Tony stroked the rabbit's soft ears. Tom took the animal out of his hands. "Why won't Jim go to jail, David, like any human caught horse-stealing?"

"You've lived in Darcey fifteen years, Tom. Why didn't Fred Raymond hang for shooting Ed Farmer?"

"Well, I always thought it was because he had the biggest house in Darcey."

Gordon nodded. "That's absolutely the answer. And Jim Taylor won't be charged with horse-stealing because he's a big man in Darcey—his family are nice people. His daughter teaches school, and has been to Europe."

Tony watched the red blood stain the bunny's white fur—he tried to understand what Gordon and Tom were talking about. Did they mean that social position expiated, extenuated, crime in Darcey? That didn't make Jim any less of a criminal, of course—that he didn't go to jail for it. Tony had never liked Jim Taylor. There was something large—and vacuous—about the man's talk and his gestures. Still—not liking him, not trusting him really—Tony had put his money in his bank. It was only chance that he hadn't lost every cent he had in the world.

"How much did you lose, Tony?" Tom asked.

"Eighty cents. Not much, but I hate losing every penny of it."

"I'll say this for Jim Taylor—it takes a smart man to get a Scotchman's money. Even eighty cents."

"It isn't Jim Taylor's fault that he didn't get more out of me," Tony growled. "I drew my money out last spring."

Tony didn't really give a hoot about Jim Taylor, but he speculated about the family quite often these days. He wished he might make some sign reassuring to them of his friendship, especially to Carolyn; he found that his knowledge of social procedure didn't cover a situation of this sort.

He was fairly sure that the family would feel the decline from social eminence more keenly than the lack of money. Nothing about their home, their clothes, their manner of

entertaining had ever suggested a pride in their wealth, or a dependence on it.

But what if Mrs. Taylor lost caste socially? What if people stopped thinking her way of leaving visiting cards, her use of fork and spoon and napkin, the criterion of social etiquette? What if Darcey stopped asking her to review books? What if she no longer featured in every musical event in Darcey? There her leadership had lain. If she lost that position of command, Tony could feel sorry for her, though he had never liked the woman. He knew that she was possessed of a stern sort of pride in the things she considered valuable. Would the humbling of that pride be too much for her to accept?

Tony said something of the sort to Judith Flannery one evening late in October, after the first shock of the bank failure had subsided. He had gone out to their place to help Stephen change his goldfish from their outdoor pool to the big glass tank in the sunroom. It was long, messy job. Tony's hands and arms were freezing when they finished, his knees muddy. Judith sent the boys to bed, and brought Tony in to the first fire of the year, a glass of cider, and a plate of molasses cookies. Tom had gone to the city with a mental case.

Tony was as content on the Flannery hearth as Candy, who slumbered noisily at his feet. Tony prodded the dog's side with his toe, and Candy growled a lazy protest.

"The Taylors won't lose their social prestige," Judith assured him. "Social position in Darcey isn't based on money."

"Not money. The—er—disgrace might make a difference." Again Tony felt odd to be speaking so of friends.

"Not to Darcey. And I don't think it will to Mrs. Taylor."

Tony looked at Judith encouragingly. "Go on," he urged. "Well, Darcey loves talk. Scandal only increases your—er—piquancy in Darcey. Social Darcey."

"Mine!" Tony was startled. "What—"

Judith laughed. "You sound as if you might be concealing a past. I meant any one's. Yours. The Taylor's. They're more interesting, now, you know, than they have ever been. They've always been a little stodgy. I'm sorry—you're a friend of theirs, aren't you?"

Tony shrugged. "I started this discussion. As for being a friend, I really don't know. I've known them ever since I first came to Darcey. I don't think they are people one is intimate with. I—I always felt little sorry for Carolyn. I always felt that she might be different if she had a different family and life. I go there occasionally. What were you about to say?"

Judith smiled at him gently. "Just that the Taylors are important now because they are being talked about. Darcey is interested and anxious to know what they will do.

Mrs. Taylor is going to get a lot of invitations just so Darcey can watch how she behaves when pinned down on a board. A scientific investigation——"

"A damnably ghoulish one."

"You don't enter into the spirit of Darcey sport."

"Mrs. Taylor..." Vivisection was cruel, even when justified.

"She doesn't mind. Really, Tony, she doesn't. It's dramatic, you see. She likes holding her head high."

"She—— Judith, I don't like the woman. I think she is bloodless, and overly dominant. But she's a lady. She must be sensitive, ashamed——"

"But she's not! Not ashamed, I mean. If she admits her husband's errors, she doesn't claim a share in them. She's always had a fine disdain for business. Trade, you English would call it. Besides, there's only one sin a wife in Darcey can't condone in her husband."

"If you mean adultery..." Talk with Judith was like turning a kaleidoscope; each word she said dropped a piece into some new pattern of thought.

"I mean just that. With the qualification, that its results become public. Mr. Taylor was a thief, probably. Mrs. Taylor can still declare him faithful. Truly, in Darcey, pride may dwell in strange places. As for her being sensitive—I met her to-day—she's a member of the Parent-Teachers' Association, you know. I was embarrassed to know what to do. I thought it wise to proceed as if nothing had happened."

"So should I. I've avoided going near the Taylors."

"Well, you've been wrong. She reproached me for not having been to see her. She resented not being openly consoled with, and showed her resentment."

"By Jove!"

"By Jove, indeed. Oh, she's being such a model of sweet submission to the slings of adversity. Things about this mess which would drive me into a deep hole don't seem to bother her. The disgrace, their own losses—I mean the loss of her children's security, and their pride in their father—I think those things would be important."

"And Mrs. Taylor——"

"No. You see, Tom says they can't pin anything on Mr. Taylor unless the stockholders and depositors ask for an investigation—his books don't show more than over-optimism. Likewise, Mrs. Taylor feels that no moral breach has been made. In other words, he is innocent unless proven guilty. I couldn't take that attitude, I'm afraid. But she is able to maintain her serenity, her aloofness—Do you understand what I am saying so badly, Tony?"

He nodded. "Dirt doesn't stick to a greased surface. She feels as if she were thoroughly oiled with gentility."

"Exactly! For instance, she asked me to-day to let

Michael take music lessons from her. She said she wouldn't mind having to give lessons if she could have all *nice* children for pupils. She meant socially nice."

"The social structure of Darcey—"

"Funny, isn't it? I've spent many a lonesome evening, when Tom was at the hospital, wondering what the qualifications are."

"What did you decide?"

"Well, it's arbitrary—just like their moral code. Morally, you do what Darcey considers conventional. Socially, you must be asked to bridge parties. You must have velvet over-stuffed furniture in your living-room, and a picture of the Lone Wolf over the divan."

Tony rubbed the homespun cushion of his maple arm-chair; he searched the shadows behind and above the scuffed leather couch. Nothing fiercer than a Wallace Nutting orchard hung there. He grinned at Judith. "You don't qualify."

"Oh, yes. Mrs. Rhodes invited me to bridge, just to-day."

"Are you going?"

"That doesn't matter. It's being asked that counts."

It didn't occur to Tony to dispute Judith Flannery's analysis of Mrs. Taylor's feelings about the bank failure, but he could not help being uncomfortable on his own part the first time he met her on the street.

He could detect no change in her appearance, nor in her manner. She wore the same nondescript sort of clothes. She spoke in the same whispering, ladylike voice. Tony, from his height, found it difficult to hear what she was saying.

So he stood, bent almost double, on the windy corner, while she talked aimlessly about how long it had been since Tony had gone out to the house. "You mustn't wait to be invited," she told him. "We always keep open house for the young people."

"I'll come out to see you soon," he promised hastily. "I've been busy."

"We shall have to move, you know."

"Oh! Er—will you? I mean—I'm most awfully sorry." He wished he'd stayed at the hospital, where he belonged.

"We shall put everything we have—our home, and our own savings—into an effort to recoup the bank's losses." Mrs. Taylor's voice was plaintive, but her martyrdom was being borne well. Besides, Tony had heard that the bank held a twenty-five-thousand-dollar mortgage on the big old Taylor house, which was almost without any real-estate value.

"Carolyn feels her position," Mrs. Taylor was rambling on. Tony's ears were freezing. "It's quite different teaching school because you have to, rather than from a whim."

Tony had been sorry for Carolyn all along. She was sensitive—a lighter blow than this could have served to crush her. But just now he thought her very lucky to be shut up in a nice, warm schoolroom.

"Carolyn feels that the young people are slighting her now. Especially you, Tony."

"Me?" Because he had felt sorry for the girl, and had tried to be kind...It was what a chap got..

"You used to come regularly to see her And you haven't since the trouble. Naturally.."

Confound the woman! She had a gift for placing a fellow in the wrong. Carolyn surely didn't feel that he was obligated. "I'm dreadfully sorry. It's just that I've been busy. Gordon's being away.."

Somehow, Tony managed to end the interview And the next evening, whether through duty or compassion, he rang the door-bell of the bleak Taylor mansion.

Carolyn greeted him without excitement. Almost, Tony felt, with indifference. This relieved him. He had a pleasant enough time singing old French songs and came again a few nights later. He was lonely. The rowdy younger set offended and bored him. Almost imperceptibly, he formed the habit of visiting Carolyn at least once a week. He could never detect any evidence that she had dressed up for him. She always greeted him quietly, and with restraint. Once or twice she admitted that she had school papers to grade, and let him help her. She admired his superior knowledge of French, a language she wanted to learn to speak.

"I talked French as soon as I did English," he told her "My nurse was from Gaspe."

Tony asked Carolyn to go to the Christmas dance. There were to be only two dances this year—the depression having finally got around to curtailing this activity. So the dance on Christmas night, and the one on New Year's Eve, would be especially important.

Tony remembered every detail of the dance to which he had taken Carolyn a year before. But he felt differently about Carolyn now. They were friends. He himself had changed. He had now definitely allied himself with the cultural, intellectual—at any rate, the more dignified—groups of Darcey society. He had spent fifty dollars for two season tickets to the Civic Music League Concerts at Columbus. Twice he had taken Carolyn to these performances, sat beside her while Iturbi and Rosa Ponselle wove magic about them. He drove home with her late at night, both of them silent, remembering the music they had just heard. Their names were listed together in the account which invariably appeared in the Darcey social columns. "Members of Darcey society who attended the Iturbi concert at

Columbus last night were Attorney and Mrs. Alfred Chandler, Mrs. Sol Levi, Miss Carolyn Taylor, Dr. A. E. McNeill, Mr. and Mrs. P. Campbell Day . . ."

Carolyn smiled gently when Tony mentioned the dance. "Oh, I don't think so, Tony. Thank you so much."

"It would be fun. There aren't many things of that sort to go to in Darcey."

"I expect you have often found us dull. You've lived nearly all your life in cities, haven't you?"

She managed to turn the discussion away from the dance. Definitely, she had refused his invitation. Refused with dignity. Her reasons were her own—she made no attempt to explain them to Tony. In her own heart, pride sang a little anthem. This invitation had not been wangled by her mother! Tony had asked her because he had wanted her to go, because he wanted to go himself, and Carolyn was now his logical companion. She remembered how handsome he was in evening dress. She wished she might see him so again. But she would not risk this new wonder which had come into her life, this new companionship with Tony. She would not put herself, before Tony's eyes, into contrast with girls like Marietta Doyle.

Tony, for his part, was honestly sorry that Carolyn had refused his invitation. At the same time, he admired the dignity with which she had done so. He only suspected her reasons. He knew that she was never at ease with the crowd which made the dances the hilarious, racketsy things they were.

It had been rather fun—interesting, surely—to draw her out, to discover what her interests were, what her talents might be. Tony felt a creator's pride now when she would enter into a fairly lively discussion with him on the merits of some book, or about the trouble at the shoe factory. Oh, he had worked no miracle. Carolyn was still shy. She still dressed dowdily. He could scarcely suggest that she buy herself a new, and plain, suit when he was aware that her salary was probably feeding the Taylor family these days. He wanted to get her a nutria coat for a Christmas present—she was such a blue, frozen little thing in the cold—but he didn't dare. If he knew Mrs. Taylor—and, alas, he did!—he'd stick pretty closely to the book-candy-flowers formula.

Tom howled in protest when Tony admitted that he was not going to the dance.

"I asked Carolyn," Tony explained, "but she doesn't want to go."

"For God's sake, Tony!" Tony remembered that Tom didn't care for Carolyn.

"Well, you know how it is, Tom."

"Sure I know how it is. And high time you were doing something about it, too. Or you'll have to marry the lady."

"Don't be absurd."

"Speak for yourself, Tony. You're paired with her pretty completely—and Darcey has never heard of Plato. Tony."

"That's ridiculous. I haven't any other girl; but because I'm sorry for Carolyn and try to be a little decent to her doesn't mean—"

"It means this much—she's in a position to dictate to you whether you shall go to the dance, or not."

Tony opened his mouth to protest. Shut it again. Tom was a long way towards being right. The devil! He'd had no intention—"I may go stag," he said lamely. As he walked out of the office he could feel Tom's grin running up and down the back of his coat.

But Tony didn't go to the Christmas dance. Instead, feeling at once virtuous and slightly uncomfortable, he spent the evening singing old Christmas carols with Carolyn Taylor. He hadn't intended to do this. Indeed, the high percentage of inadvertencies in his life sometimes worried Tony. But it was easy to commit himself to this or that; and as a gentleman, he always kept his pledges. Moreover, Carolyn seemed a harmless habit—definitely restful, if also definitely unexciting.

In April, Gordon again raised his salary. At which Tony, who really didn't need a car, ordered a brand new one from a St. Louis distributor. Carolyn was properly thrilled at this news, and before he knew it he had invited her to drive to St. Louis with George and Mary Betty Rapp, and return with him in the new car. Since this invitation was somewhat outside the pattern of the Taylor code, he rather expected her to decline it; instead, she accepted as a matter of course. Arrived in St. Louis, the Rapps wanted to see a ball game, whereas Tony wanted to pay his respects to Celoud at Boone, and have an hour or so with Breaker. They separated, therefore, and Tony, feeling expansive, took Carolyn to lunch at the Castilla.

To his delight, she approved the quaint atmosphere, the romantic guitar music, the waitresses in Castilian costume and even registered a mild excitement. Carolyn could look very pretty, Tony reflected. It was genuine fun doing little things for her. A dollar luncheon seemed to thrill her as completely as a big party.

Seeing that she admired the pottery dishes, he stopped at the gift shop on their way out of the restaurant and bought for Carolyn a squat little teapot of a dull green glaze, and two ivory-coloured cups and saucers.

Walking up Washington Avenue beside Tony, Carolyn held her gift as a child might, in both hands. Tony had always loved the deserted downtown streets of Sunday afternoon. He and Carolyn looked at the window displays of wholesale garment merchants, and selected lavish wardrobes for each other. They had something of an argument

over Carolyn's being able to wear pink. Tony insisted that she could—certain shades. If she'd darken her eyebrows and lashes, her grey eyes would seem darker, too. They walked on, smiling, to the automobile salesroom.

It was an hour before the car was ready. But Carolyn didn't seem to mind. And she was properly complimentary about the car, stroking the sage-green whipcord cushion with admiring fingers. She smiled up at Tony, as he got in beside her.

"I know it's an honour to be the first to ride in it, Tony."

"I don't know of any one I'd rather have," he answered. And realized, suddenly, that he meant it.

He asked Carolyn if her mother was expecting her home at any given time. No. But of course, there was school at nine the next morning. Tony laughed. If they didn't get home before then, Mrs. Taylor would have all Darcey to help her worry.

He mentioned Celoud and Breaker at Boone. Would Carolyn mind—would she be too bored—if he drove past there, and spent an hour or so?

"I'd feel badly if you didn't go, Tony," she assured him. "I know how you feel about your work."

Tony doubted if she did—she had always seemed embarrassed about it—but he spent some minutes explaining to her how important it was that a young doctor keep up his professional connections. As they drove up to the Boone group, he could see that Carolyn was impressed. Hunting a place to park among all the shining cars, he told her what the different buildings were.

"And you worked here, Tony?"

"Six long years, lady." Well, he was pretty proud of it, too. Finally, in desperation, he swung his car up on the cinders back of the power house—the view wasn't so good here. He'd hunt up Breaker. If he was busy, Carolyn could at least wait in his office. Besides, Tony wanted to see Breaker. His old friend was going back home to Raleigh, to try his hand at private practice.

Tony guided Carolyn through the maze of buildings and corridors, checking his stride to match her shorter step. He'd got into the habit of going on a dead run here at Boone. He spoke to every nurse, out of habit, too. Though a lot were new to him, occasionally one greeted him with a glad smile and spoke his name.

A nurse told him that Doctor Breaker was in his office. And there they found him, his feet on the desk, a cold pipe in his mouth. He greeted Tony noisily, and with the usual insulting epithets. Good old Breaker! Tony would never have another friend like him. When he stopped for breath. Tony introduced him to Carolyn. Breaker was cordial, suggested refreshments, and quickly produced a

pitcher of orange juice, glasses, and three bottles of lemon pop.

Tony told about the new car. Breaker told about his own plans. He was leaving June first. Could Tony take care of himself? Tony would try. Meanwhile, he wanted to have a word with Celoud. Could they go over together, and would Carolyn mind waiting? Breaker was secretly amused by her docile assent.

"Nice girl," he commented as they hurried down the corridor.

"Yes. Quite!"

"What happened to the hot blonde?" Last year—eighteen months ago—Tony had brought Marietta down for an evening of dancing. Breaker had joined them in a pretty gay twelve hours. Altogether, the trip had cost Tony fifty dollars.

"California, I believe," Tony said briefly.

"Not so hot, now, eh?"

Tony was silent, and Breaker suppressed a grin.

"This girl is more your sort," he suggested.

"How do you know? She hasn't said three words to you."

"Three is all I need, take my word for it, she's more your sort than the blonde would ever be."

"A fat lot you know," Tony said gruffly, clanging the elevator gate.

"Annie, darling, I slept with you for six years. Only your wife will ever know you as well as I do. God help the poor thing!"

Tony found a lot to say to Celoud. Celoud listened with flattering attention, was free with comment and advice. For a busy man, and a great one, he was being very kind.

It was five o'clock. And cloudy. A spit of rain hit Tony's cheek. They might hit a storm going back, Tony explained to Carolyn, and declined Breaker's invitation to supper. They parted on the kerb.

"By, Bill!"

"By, Annie!"

Tony wheeled into traffic, keeping to the right lane, maintaining a conscientious thirty miles an hour. Was Carolyn warm enough? Oh, yes. Riding in the rain was rather fun. It wouldn't spoil his new car? Not half! Was Carolyn hungry? No. Then they'd plan to stop at Wentzville for something to eat. Fried chicken . . .

Carolyn asked if Tony had seen the doctor he'd wanted to. He tried to tell her about Celoud—how great he was, yet how approachable. Big men usually were, he'd found. It was only the little person, trying to seem great who needed a cloud of mystery and ultra-detachment about his person. What had Carolyn thought of Boone?

It was so big—she hated to think of that many sick

people. She mustn't think of them that way—she must think of them as people who were getting well. Why, yes, that did make a difference, didn't it? And was quite as true. He told her that the world would be in a bad way if it weren't for hospitals. Then he laughed and told her about old Mr. Leigh, who insisted that there had been no germs fifty years ago. Not a germ in Darcey until the doctors and hospitals got active. He forgot the great number of tiny graves out in the old part of the town cemetery.

Carolyn nodded soberly. Being a doctor was as noble a thing as she knew. She thought a boy must be pretty fine who decided to do that work. Tony told her about his father and his grandfather, his own boyhood ambition. Told her more than he had ever told any one in Darcey, except Gordon. It was raining hard, now. He set the windshield wipers to going briskly. The new car purred along as if it enjoyed rain. Tony told Carolyn about Canada. About Montreal in the winter, about how one could ride a toboggan for two miles—from the top of Mount Royal into the very heart of the city, stopping in front of the largest hotel. Or could, when he was a boy. He told her about the countryside in the summertime—the short, bright Canadian summers, when everything grew so fast, and colours were so intense. With her listening, so absorbedly, the boyhood skies took on a deeper blue, the wheat fields glowed more golden than they had ever done before. He could see again the glistening flanks of his father's cob, see the spurts of dust beneath his hoofs, hear his father's voice in his ears. Tony smiled down at the girl beside him.

Tony found the right road, and also found it congested with traffic—as he might have known it would be on Sunday evening. Sunday trippers going back upstate. City people returning from a spring week-end at the river resorts. Only, he guessed the Meramec was flooded all over the country. Warily, he inched his car along, trying to keep off of the soft shoulder. Stop and start, stop and start. He looked at his gas gauge. Better than half-full—they'd get beyond St. Charles before he'd be justified in stopping. He wished now that they'd left the city earlier. Night had fallen, black and impenetrable. They'd not get home for hours at this rate. He hated the shabby, persistent sedan in front of him—as if that one lopsided car were holding him up by its own efforts.

"Mad dogs and Englishmen," he sang through his teeth. "Go out in the noonday sun. The Chinaman wouldn't care to, the Japanese wouldn't dare to—Carolyn, aren't you starved?"

"No. Are you?"

"I certainly am."

"We had such a big lunch."

"Hours ago."

"What time is it?"

He held his wrist towards her. "Seven-thirty."

"Oh, Tony . . ."

"Uhuh? I mean . . ."

"Would you think I were very foolish if I were to try—consciously try—to talk like you?"

"How do I talk?"

"Well, you know how you talk!"

"You mean, say b-e-a-n for b-e-e-n, and w-e-a-r for w-e-r-e?"

Carolyn laughed. "Yes."

"I've been told that I sound pretty darned affected."

"Oh, no, Tony! The way you talk is perfect!"

Tony laughed—she was absurd. He had yet to find the man who wouldn't enjoy such adoring absurdity. "Well, I heard a chap say once that words should please the ear, not offend it. If you like the way I say words, and want to make the same sounds I do, why shouldn't you? But if you were to do it just because I, Tony McNeill, talk that way, you'd be a fool. I mean you'd be a fool to try to talk my way, because it is a different way from what Darcey is accustomed to use. You see, it's quite possible that Darcey talk is better than mine."

"You know it isn't."

"I'm not going to argue about pronunciation. Darcey has a lot of localisms, too, that used to grate on my nerves. Oh—'that-a-way,' and saying 'arn' for iron. 'Craw pappy' for crayfish can still make me laugh. And nobody dies in Darcey, they 'pass away.'"

Carolyn's eyes were big. "I've said that," she confessed. "It seemed—kinder."

"Why? Death is a very final sort of thing. Sometimes it's cruel, but often it is kind. I see it enough to know."

"Does it frighten you, Tony—to see people die?"

"No. Why do you ask?"

"You seem so young."

"You don't know me as I am at my work."

"Don't I?"

"No. I try to keep it and my personal life separate. It's better—both ways."

"Yes. But aren't you ever afraid? If a person is dreadfully hurt, or in terrific pain, don't you want to run?"

"No-o. Not that, exactly. I get excited—and I shouldn't. Not in emergencies, thank heaven. But when I know a case is going to be a stiff one, and it finally comes around—then I get shivers up my spine. Generally, that's in maternity work."

"Oh." A pause. "Tony . . ."

"Yes, dear?" He felt her jump convulsively. He smiled down at her. They had come to a complete stop—cars

were three deep in the right-hand lanes. No east-bound traffic apparently. Could there be a tie-up?

"It's getting awfully late. Is anything wrong? The bridge?"

"There must be a chance we'll get through, or we'd be told to turn around and go back."

"Ye-es." They sat on, talking fitfully. Once Carolyn asked how far they were from the river.

After hours of this delay—it actually was after nine o'clock—a man in a rubber cape could be seen coming down the road, stopping to talk to the driver of each car. Now, occasionally, a car pulled out of line and, with great difficulty, turned and headed east again. The man came up to Tony's car. Tony switched on the ceiling light—the man was a member of the Highway Police. "Where you from?"

"Darcey. I'm Doctor Anthony McNeill."

"Need to get there, do you, Doctor?"

"Yes, sir, I do. I am operating in the morning."

"I see. O.K. I'll pass you." He scribbled on a pad he held and tucked the paper under the mirror. "River has come over the road for about half a mile—about eighteen inches of water. We're taking the cars west, twenty at a time. You'll have to drive slow."

He passed on to the car behind them. Tony touched Carolyn's hand. "Frightened?"

"No. It's—thrilling."

"Yes, exciting. Even eighteen inches of river water can be an adventure. Are you cold?"

"No-o." But he heard her teeth chatter. He shucked out of his topcoat and pulled it around her shoulders. Stilled her protests with a kiss. She was so helpless, and perhaps frightened. His strength could protect her.

She struggled against the embrace—she'd done that the night he'd taken her to the dance. He held her face between the palms of his hands, and tried to see her eyes in the dark. "Don't you want me to kiss you, Carolyn?" He thought it had been unexpectedly pleasant.

"I—it isn't right."

"To kiss you? Why isn't it?"

"I—you know it isn't."

"Don't you like it?"

She turned her head away from him. "That isn't—it doesn't make any difference—"

"Why, it does, too! Naturally, I can see how you'd hate to be kissed by a man you disliked. But I thought you liked me, Carolyn."

"I do, but—"

"Then I'm going to kiss you." And he did. It was fun to tease her. Fun to be blind to her conviction that a kiss was the first step to seduction. For a girl of twenty-three or four, she was so darn innocent. He kissed her again—

that time her lips were soft and yielding. Her boneless little body crumpled against his hard chest. She was sweet.

Just then the cars up ahead moved fifty feet, and Tony started his engine and moved too. In the next wait, he contented himself with drawing Carolyn's unresisting head against the hollow of his shoulder. This looked like an all night's job to him. Would her mother be frantic? They'd 'phone as soon as they could.

"No," Carolyn said. "She'll know I'm safe either with you or Cousin Mary Betty. She trusts you completely, Tony." A pause, and then, "I trust you, too, Tony. I—I'm not angry because you—kissed me."

Her lips were parted her eyes shining. This time his kiss was returned with a naive fervour that sent his head whirling. Whew! This was more than he had bargained for. He must be careful from now on.

Restoring her head to the curve of his shoulder, he held her quietly, while the rain beat down on the long procession of motionless cars.

"Tony."

"Yes, dear."

"You wouldn't kiss me—that way—if you didn't love me. would you?"

"Of course I love you, child."

Tony's reply was automatic, the gesture of a decent and rather unsophisticated male person. His reply was even true after a fashion. Yet the instant he had spoken, he realized that he was over the dam in terms of a commitment which he hadn't dreamed of letting himself in for. He was neither in love with Carolyn, nor was he prepared for marriage with her.

While these thoughts churned in his head, and indeed, partly to defend himself from them, Tony pressed Carolyn's meek and tearful face ever closer into the curve of his shoulder. If he had had any doubts about what had happened, they were removed when, after a moment, Carolyn looked up at him, her face lit with a radiance such as nuns know when they pledge their final chaste vows to the Divine Lover.

"Oh Tony," she breathed. "I love you so much. Ever since that first time when you took me home from the hospital." Then, with a rush of shy confidence: "Tony, darling, I tried so hard not to let you see. I was so ashamed. It didn't seem possible—you're so wonderful. And now—hold my hands, Tony. I'm trembling so. Don't mind me crying, Tony, darling. It's just that I'm—so happy."

She was, in fact, transformed. It was as if a bright light had suddenly been snapped on in the shaded cloister of Carolyn's shy spirit. Tony had thought of her as a girl without confidence, almost without will. But the Galatea

into whose veins he had inadvertently poured the elixir of life was a very different woman from the dim, uncertain creature he had known.

"I was afraid, Tony. I've always been afraid . . . I'm not afraid now. Tony, I'll be a good wife to you. I'll work, I'll do anything. If being hurt—terribly—would help you, oh, Tony, I'd love it!"

Hungrily, she reached for his hand and kissed it. "I can do that now, can't I, Tony? I can even—" Her shy fingers caressed his temples. "Oh, I've dreamed of doing that . . . Tony, why do you look so sad?"

In the presence of this phenomenon, Tony felt a kind of awed discomfort, like a tone-deaf man at a symphony. Not now, certainly, and probably not ever could he make any return comparable with this prodigal outpouring. But if this were so, was he not wronging Carolyn by accepting her unqualified, almost defenceless, gift of utter devotion? It was this thought that furrowed his brow; but when Carolyn spoke, he was quick to dissemble.

"I was thinking, darling. You know my salary is very small. You wouldn't have it easy."

For answer, she raised herself in his arms and presented him with a birdlike kiss on the cheek.

"Silly boy! Who wants it easy? I'll have you, won't I? We can be engaged. I can love you. I won't have to pretend any more." She snuggled back into the curve of his arm.

Well, it was done, reflected Tony. To retreat now—it was unthinkable. So simple a creature, and so gentle. He couldn't hurt her. He wouldn't.

"We'll get married, Carolyn, dear," he said quietly.

She looked at him with wide eyes. "Yes, Tony."

He smiled down at her. "Go to sleep, dear. There, they're starting up again."

It was a relief when the long line of cars began to move and Tony was again obliged to put his car in gear and give his attention to driving. Carolyn curled up in a corner of the seat. A few miles farther on he looked down and she was sleeping.

It was six o'clock of a grey and drizzling morning when Tony finally halted his car in front of the Taylor mansion. Across the street, old Mr. Leigh, in his shirt sleeves and suspenders, emerged to bring in the milk. There would be at least one witness of their early morning arrival, reflected Tony, as he kissed his fiancée briefly and watched her run up the walk. He meshed the gears, felt the wheels under him begin to turn. He glanced up again at Taylors' porch, and sighed. Carolyn was coming back, and her mother, fully dressed, her lips thinly pursed, was with her.

"Tony," Carolyn said softly, but urgently—her eyes were dark and wide—"tell Mother. Quickly!"

Tony kept his eyes on Carolyn's face—tried to ignore the shamed feeling he had that he needed to placate Mrs. Taylor. He heard his voice, words tumbling out upon each other. "...hospital...new car...flood..."

"Quite an exciting story!" Mrs. Taylor's icy voice was like the first blow of a cold shower.

"Well...yes, it is. It was." He cursed his tripping tongue, his foolish bleat of laughter.

"An unfortunate experience for Carolyn. For any girl, Doctor."

"Why..." Tony snapped his eyes towards her. Why, the evil-minded old...

"I do not propose to have *my* daughter's name bandied—" "Mother!"

"Mrs. Taylor!" Tony was proud of his clear, ringing tone. "I'm glad you came out. I was going to ask you to give the newspaper an account of our engagement. Carolyn's and mine. Please see to it...I'm afraid I must go on to the hospital now. Good-day!"

He leaned out of the door and kissed Carolyn's cool cheek. He could see her eyes sparkle. He could hear Mrs. Taylor gasp.

Well, he'd done it! Nice and brown, too. But what did it matter? In the long run? The engagement would be announced at once. Mrs. Taylor could be depended on for that. After which any gossip occasioned by his night on the road with the banker's daughter would be quickly dissipated. He felt tired, physically and emotionally. Well, soon he would be married...for better or for worse. At least he would not have to face again the Jabberwock of Darcey gossip.

Chapter Fourteen

BETWEEN HIS arrival at the hospital and the inexorable moment when Asy knocked on the door bringing the breakfast tray, Tony had much less than three hours of sleep. He was bone-tired, but a cold shower gave him a temporary lift, and at nine-thirty he appeared in the ward to face a heavy day with weary stoicism.

Tony had, first, a nasty delivery—a diseased mother, and a blind, infected baby. Scrub as you will, and change every stitch of your clothing, a case of that sort leaves a chap feeling septic. Tony made his rounds aloofly. He had no appetite for Esther's good dinner. He had a slight headache, which might be due to the day's heat—but he didn't

think so. That afternoon he had to go into Flannery's office and see his out-patients. Darn! Diabetes and asthma can be boring! Tony supposed that internists had their place. He was plenty glad, however, to have Tom at a clinic in Denver just now. It would be bad enough breaking the news to Gordon—the chief wouldn't like it much, he was pretty sure. But Flannery—Tony had no stomach at the moment for Tom's searching ironies.

As a final straw, that afternoon Tony had to deal with a committee—a group of women soliciting a free hernia operation for a child of poor parents. Tony, promising that the services of the doctors would be given, found it difficult to be patient and courteous with the chattering women. When he was finally free of them, Miss Riley told him that he looked tired. Tony found a grin, and said some inane thing about Flannery's shoes not fitting him. It was three o'clock. Perhaps he could help Gordon. He'd tell him about the hernia. And that other matter.

The newspaper came out about five, and if he knew Mrs. Taylor the announcement would be in it. He must forewarn the chief—it was only decent to do so. Down at the far end of the corridor, he caught a glimpse of Gordon's white gown swirling around the turn of the stairway. He'd be going to the lab. Tony followed him, slowly.

Gordon was perched on a high stool, his eye pressed to the microscope, when Tony came in. "Shut the door," Gordon murmured. "And come here."

Tony obeyed—swung his long legs around his own stool. Leaned back against the table top. The zinc made a strip of coolness across his ribs. "Lowe serum," Gordon muttered. "Streptococcus."

"Uh-huh. He'll die by Saturday." Eric would have to get out and hustle them. His father wouldn't leave any money.

"D'ya ever see a heart puncture?" Gordon pushed the microscope towards Tony. He adjusted it, and observed the little green chain. "I did," Gordon said. "The patient just gave a sigh and died. Like air coming out of a balloon."

"Mr. Lowe hasn't a chance."

"No. Too bad." Gordon wiped his eyeglasses. "Tony, what's the matter with you?"

Tony jerked. "Why—"

"You've had a frown between your eyes all day. It's an inch deep."

Tony rubbed his forehead. "I... Chief, I'm going to be married."

Gordon blew on his eyeglasses. "Sudden, isn't it?" he said slowly.

"Yes."

"Who?"

"Carolyn Taylor."

Doctor Gordon sighed gently. He adjusted his spectacles and looked at Tony. His eyes were kind. "If you seemed a bit happier, son, I'd offer my congratulations."

Tony clenched a fist until the knuckles creaked. "I expect you might anyway, sir. And—thank you."

Gordon frowned. "Tony..."

Tony looked over at the spiræa bush which blew outside the screened window. If he weren't careful, Gordon would have the whole thing out of him—and a hell of a trick that would be to play on Carolyn.

Gordon's voice was very kind. "There is something. Tell me about it—how it happens just now, so suddenly? I am not sure I like the idea of marriage for you at this particular point in your career."

Tony nodded. "I know. I would rather wait. But it seems best to do it. Soon."

"Oh? To whom does it seem best?"

"To me. Carolyn drove back with me from St. Louis. We got back about six this morning. Nothing happened except that the Missouri River flooded. That wasn't our fault, but"—his voice was bitter—"try telling that to the Darcey gossips."

Gordon looked very sorry. "Darcey—" he began. "When you first came to Darcey, Tony, I wondered if I were doing you a favour by bringing you here. I knew so well what the town was. What it had done to me."

"To you, sir?" Gordon seemed the most untouchable of men, one completely above the possible smirch of personalities.

"Yes. Have you ever wondered why I go so often to the movies, Tony?"

"Well, no, sir. I suppose you enjoyed them."

"Some of them I do. But it took a lot of pressure to reduce me to Mae West and Jimmie Cagney."

Tony smiled. It was doing him a world of good to talk with the chief.

"You've been in Darcey—how long, Tony?"

"Two years."

"Yes. It took me four. I move more slowly. Four years to learn that Darcey can be depended upon to hurt a man in his every vulnerable spot. To learn that I could not play bridge at the country club without becoming involved in the gossip-free-for-all which flourish there, that I could not be a member of the Town Club without having a brother member expect me to use my professional probity to clear him of blame and responsibility when a man was killed in his factory. Four years to learn that unless a man is encased in steel, unless his attitude is as impersonal as that of an ambulance interne, he will be bruised and mishandled by the tongues of Darcey. If he is friendly, he will be imposed upon. His most innocent gesture will be twisted into

an obscenity, his most generous impulse will be called calculating. I could go on——"

"I know what you mean." Tony did, as a burned child knows fire.

"Darcey talks about me. They cannot hurt me because I do not live on the same plane with them."

"Tom——"

"Tom has a gift for people. I haven't it at all. You have, but have lacked a certain ruthlessness which should go with that gift. At any rate, Tom has played in better luck than you or I have done. Judith is one of his protections. Another is—Tom is charming company, but I don't think he ever shows the real Tom Flannery to Darcey. He jokes and laughs and takes a drink, but the real Tom doesn't show itself very often to any one. I saw it once—when his little daughter died in his arms. Of mastoiditis."

"I didn't know he'd had a daughter. But Tom's a prince——"

"Life has cuffed him into shape. It cuffs all of us. One way or another."

Tony sighed. "I hope you are right, Chief. Carolyn is a quiet, gentle girl—I'll try not to hurt her. She loves me, you see. I haven't the vanity to understand why. I don't know whether the fact will help us or not. But I shall have to be careful to protect her love..." His voice trailed away. He leaned wearily against the table.

Gordon cleared his throat with a loud, rasping noise. "Let's go up to supper."

As usual, a copy of the afternoon edition of the *Darcey Daily News* lay before each plate. Tony looked, and found what he was looking for:

Mr. and Mrs. James Taylor announce the engagement of their eldest daughter, Carolyn Drew Taylor, to Doctor Anthony E. McNeill, of the staff of Westwood Hospital. The marriage will take place the week of June 15.

Even to the date of the marriage, Tony noted resignedly.

A snort from Gordon was, he thought, provoked by the same item. But no, it was a story on the page opposite concerning the appointment of Jim Taylor as a National Bank Auditor. His headquarters would be in Kansas City, where his family would join him as soon as their home in Darcey could be disposed of.

"There's justice for you," shouted Gordon angrily.

But Tony found this news cheering. He'd meant that Carolyn should break clean from her family. This way it would be done naturally, without an argument. He paid no attention to Gordon's ravings about the inscrutable ways of politics.

"I don't see how I can spare you for much of a honeymoon, Tony," Gordon said, while they ate supper.

Tony felt his face redden. "Please, sir!" he begged.

"All right—I don't like the word either. What about your salary? Will you be able to manage on it?"

All these new details and adjustments. "We'll jolly well have to manage. Doctor..."

"Yes? I see that Callie Warburton has just had a litter of sixteen pigs. Durcos."

Tony laughed. "I happen to know that the sex of the Warburton person is male. Chief, that cottage down back of the hospital—could we live there?"

"It's only three rooms and a bath."

"It would do."

"Tony, a person is in social oblivion east of the railroad tracks in Darcey. You don't want to be too hard on Carolyn."

Tony was in no mood to be ragged. "She'll live where I say!"

"And like it? All right, Tony, you can have the place. No one's lived there since Doctor Carter died. I'll have it cleaned up. It would save you rent—you'd be close, too. A very nice arrangement, I expect. Your room across the hall can be turned into an office for you."

The chief was swell. And something else he said later made Tony feel even better. It concerned the genetics of the Taylor family.

"You know, Tony," he said, "this marriage deal of yours may not be such a bad one. That Taylor family is a curious mixture. The old man is a weak fool and a crooked politician. And the old lady—keep her out of your life as much as you can, Tony; her blood has turned to acid. But somewhere in that inheritance there must be sound stock. The oldest boy, Joe—he had guts enough to kick Papa and Mama in the face and clear out. Black sheep of the family—seems to me I recall he had some kind of an affair with the Doyle girl years ago. But he made good, on his own, too. Mining engineer now, somewhere in South America. Now this Carolyn looks a little like him—stood by him, too, when Papa and Mama were kicking him around. Maybe, you're right, Tony. Maybe, she can take it."

Tony appreciated this rather deliberately administered shot of optimism. But there were distressful, panicky moments during the next month when he wanted to run, as fast and as far as his legs would take him. It was like the running one does in a nightmare. Exhausting, fruitless. His imaginings took him nowhere.

Besides, he could not run. If he—as he sometimes imagined doing—if he got on a train and left Darcey, he would leave Carolyn and marriage behind. but he would

also leave the Tony McNeill he had tried to build and train into something creditable as a surgeon and a man. That wouldn't give him a whole lot of baggage to cart away with him.

Anyway, with Flannery away, he couldn't leave.

Twice a week, like a sparking country bumpkin, he went out to Taylors'. Kissed Carolyn dutifully, dutifully listened to her and her mother's plan for the wedding. There were certain formalities that must be gone through with. From time to time, there were occasions for out-and-out conflict with Mrs. Taylor. These bouts almost stirred Tony out of his lethargy, his mood of helpless acceptance. There was the matter of living in the cottage on the hospital grounds. They had a grand row over that. The fact that Tony would not consent to attend any sort of pre-nuptial party. That there could be no honeymoon.

Carolyn came unexpectedly to his aid in the matter of their having a "quiet" wedding. Tony was grateful. Even the ordeal of facing a "few close friends"—of being led like a lamb to slaughter before even one knowing, smug Darcey eye—he shied off from the thought of that wedding ceremony like a skittish horse from a white fence.

He had some minutes of satisfaction, too, to see the unwilling respect in Mrs. Taylor's eye when he gave Carolyn the emerald ring that had been his grandmother's. He explained the crest carved on the stone. His grandmother had been an earl's daughter. Mrs. Taylor looked at him as if he had suddenly sprouted a crown. This awed respect increased when, asked for wedding lists, he had written down the name of his sister and brother-in-law. Sir Robert Chart. Lady Chart. Tony found Mrs. Taylor's delight little less than revolting.

There were brief minutes when Tony felt guilty pangs about the way he was cheating Carolyn. An engaged girl could expect more from her lover than Tony was being able to give. He could be grateful that Carolyn's innocence and inexperience made her content with his brief kisses, made her happy just to have him sit beside her and listen to her babble of curtains, her happy chatter of getting a caterer from St. Louis. Her mother was giving them furniture from the big Taylor home. Tony, languidly, hoped they need not inherit the Robert E. Lee chair. But he didn't really care.

The hospital interest in the marriage he could neither avoid nor ignore. Esther's lumbering archness, her good-hearted offer to show Tony's bride how he liked his food prepared. He saw the nurses searching his face, his every action, for signs of thrill and romance. He expected that he disappointed them—until he discovered that he was being rather more difficult to please than usual. That wouldn't do. He mustn't antagonize the nurses against

his marriage, nor his bride. He believed in keeping personalities out of the hospital, but he knew a staff surgeon's wife is somewhat at the mercy of his associates. He hoped Carolyn wouldn't find being a doctor's wife too difficult. So he began to watch his step in front of the nurses and tried not to be too touchy these difficult days when he was torn between a wild, growing impulse to cut and run and an equally strong determination to see the thing through.

One morning, in compliance to a brief order from Gordon, he went up to the dressing-room where he found Miss Ward weeping over a badly burned hand. Tony glanced at the nurse, went about collecting the dressings he would need. He closed the door into the hall,—and came back to the girl—began to, cut away the gauze she had bundled around her hand.

"Gordon told me to give you hell," he said calmly, his eyes on his work. "Do you want me to start?"

"He is mad," she murmured. "Will he fire me, Doctor-McNeill?"

"You have made a pretty good supervisor," he said, non-committally. "How did you do this?" He examined the red, puffy fingers critically. Turned to smear unguent on a fold of gauze.

"Sterilizer."

"M-hmh-n. Steam. Hurt?"

"Yes. I don't mind. It was Doctor Gordon's yelling at me."

"Oh. Well, he does, you know."

"Yes. But he's been unusually touchy lately. We think it is because you are going to get married."

Tony held his breath for a minute. "I hadn't noticed," he said, keeping his voice casual, his eyes on the bandage.

"You wouldn't." Her voice held the tremble of tears. "The whole hospital's upset."

"Well, that's very kind of them—to be so interested. But not at all necessary."

"I think it's selfish of him. He hasn't any right to object to your marrying, just because he is a bachelor."

Tony knew that this must be quashed right here and now. "I expect he's jealous," he said, smiling into Miss Ward's eyes. "I'm a rather happy man these days."

"I'm so glad, Doctor McNeill."

Two days later, Carolyn showed him the set of crystal goblets the nurses had sent as a wedding present.

Asy was worried, too, about Tony's marriage; but then Tony was prepared for the fact that Asy feared his white gentleman would be in a bad way without his care and surveillance. "I'll still 'tend to your cloes, boss?" the black old fool asked Tony anxiously.

"Sure, Asy."

"Ain't no woman rilly un'stands a doctah. I'm glad I'm gwine have you whar I kin watch you."

"You'll pull me out of bed just the same."

"This mistis o' yors—do she know about doctahs?"

"How do you mean, Asy?"

"How they wuk all night—ain't nevah know when meal-time comes. How they say to othah ladies. 'Tak off yo' clocs so I kin get a pictuah!'"

Tony laughed—the absurd old rascal. "She'll have to learn."

Asy's black face was a pucker. "Do she know dat people aroun' doctahs nevah talks? Do she, boss? 'Cause that's a pow'ful ha'd thing fo' some ladies to learn?"

Tony nodded. "It won't any of it be easy for her, Asy," he said seriously. "We'll have to be patient with her."

"Yassir."

SOCIETY NEWS

One of the most important marriages in social Darcey will take place Saturday afternoon at four o'clock, when Miss Carolyn Drew Taylor becomes the bride of Doctor Anthony McNeill. The ceremony will be simple, with only close friends and relatives in attendance. Miss Taylor will have her sister, Mirabel, as bridesmaid. Doctor McNeill will be attended by Doctor David Gordon as best man. The service will be read by the Reverend Kennedy of the Methodist Church. The house will be decorated in ferns and white roses and snaps.

Miss Taylor's frock is to be of white starched organdie, and she will wear a large picture hat. Miss Mirabel will wear blue organdie. Their flowers will be roses. There will be a small reception after the ceremony. Doctor McNeill and his bride will be at home in quarters on the hospital grounds.

—*Darcey Daily News.*

The days passed. Slowly or not, Tony could not have said. He lived each one conscientiously, from dawn to bedtime, his eyes and thoughts on his steps as he took them, on his hands as he performed each task in its turn.

Lying in the depths of his thoughts, among a lot of other matters which had better not be disturbed—lying there where he feared to stir it up into presence, was a dread of meeting and talking with Marietta. She'd gone to California, disappeared from Darcey. But she might return at any time. What would she say, or do?

The answer to this question came—by mail—about a week before the wedding. With a spasm of terror, Tony recognized the handwriting on the envelope. It was post-

marked Lima, Peru. Tony took the letter to his room. It was brief and to the point. Tony had difficulty in adjusting himself to the revealed character of the strange girl he had known—or, rather, loved after a fashion, without really knowing.

"Dear Tony," it began. "This is just a note before we leave for the mine, Joe and I. Joe—Joseph Taylor—is my husband. We were married a month ago in California. Yes, he's Carolyn's black-sheep brother, and you're going to marry Carolyn—Joe got a delayed letter from her yesterday—and none of it makes any sense, does it, Tony? Cheer up. I'm willing to admit that my life didn't make sense for years—in fact, from the time I started to grow up in Darcey, loveliest village of the plain. But I'm also prepared to state that it makes sense now, from my point of view, and that, as you know, Tony, my angel, is the only point of view in which I'm seriously interested.

"I gave you a rather rotten time, didn't I? Well, I gave myself a worse time in the end. You know what happened, I'm sure. That I'm alive to-day is no fault of the distinguished profession which you adorn so immaculately, dear Tony. Just in passing, I might remark that your profession doesn't make sense either. Nothing makes sense, I suppose, except the fact that I'm happy. So damned happy, in fact, that I have enough happiness left over to wish you some of the same. Let that be our wedding present to you—that and our absence from the official hymeneal orgies which must be imminent by now. A Justice of the Peace in El Centro did the job for us, by the way, and so far as I know, it's legal.

"Joe, as you may have heard, is a good deal of a man. And Carolyn, as you are doomed to discover, is a good deal of a woman—you know, the Colonel's lady, etc. But don't let me kid you, Galahad, old dear. And on the other hand, don't blame me for getting a considerable kick out of signing myself

"Your loving sister-in-law,
"Marietta.

"P.S. Joe says we're going to send you a llama in a crate as soon as we catch one, named Hippocrates."

The letter arrived Friday morning, the day before the marriage day. Carolyn had heard, too. Tony found her in tears that evening. A brief note from Joe had offered congratulations, conveyed the first news the Taylor family had received of his own marriage, and enclosed a cheque for the purchase of a wedding present.

"Oh, Tony," wailed Carolyn between sobs, "he says Marietta—that awful girl!—told him I'd caught the only decent chap in Darcey!"

"Marietta is a good scout. I heard from her this morn-

ing. They're sending us a llama for a wedding present."

Carolyn's mouth dropped. "A—a what?"

"A llama. Kind of South American camel, I believe."

Carolyn's dismay was ludicrous. Tony's grin widened and he ended by laughing uproariously while Carolyn stared in angry bewilderment. Before she could protest, Tony decided that a little straight talk wouldn't hurt.

"Look, Carolyn," he said in a tone which approximated belligerency. "I got a letter from Marietta this morning. She doesn't judge you, and you'd better not try to judge her, or your brother. On the whole, it's turned out damned well, for her, for me, and, I hope, for you."

"But—how about Joe?"

Tony's lips tightened. "If you ask me, I think it's turned out all right for Joe, too... Now stop crying and forget it. Let's talk about something else."

It was his first essay in the quasi-marital role of male peremptoriness. It worked. Carolyn obediently choked back her sobs and soon was chattering brightly about their new house.

All that month, Tony had been aware that carpenters and painters were busy about the little stucco cottage down at the north end of the hospital grounds. For the past week, he had known that Carolyn and Nelson were working there. Every day he had seen the Taylor sedan standing on the driveway. He had seen curtains go up at the newly-washed windows, geraniums and petunias come to bloom in the flower boxes on the porch railings. At dusk, he had seen the nurses stroll, arm in arm, down that way. They carried flashlights, and he had seen them peer into the windows. A natural, understandable curiosity. Tony had felt none of it.

But Carolyn seemed not to feel any lack on his part—she told him, now, contentedly, that everything in the house was ready. Even to Sunday's food in the icebox. A new, electric icebox. "It's all so nice," she sighed. "It's the first time in my life I've had things look the way I want them. And the wedding presents! Come and look at them."

The collection was a considerable one. The Taylors had many friends. Tony seemed to have his own. Grateful patients were represented. Tony's mother had sent the family flat silver, old-fashioned, heavily ornamented. Decent of her, Tony thought. Mrs. Taylor handled it with respect. She had given them the traditional tea service. Tony had never been served tea in Darcey.

The gifts made an odd assemblage. The etching of Melrose Abbey from the Flannerys. A set of crocheted doilies from Mrs. Leigh. An Italian-lace luncheon cloth from Mrs. Rhodes. A Wedgwood breakfast service from

the Doyles. Lamps and candlesticks. Electric toasters and odd bits of silver plate. The Darcey Medical Society and the Shoeworkers' Union had produced immense cocktail shakers, exactly alike.

Chapter Fifteen

TONY WENT back to the hospital. It was barely nine o'clock. He decided that he ought to pack his clothes and have Asy help him move his possessions down to the new house. He still felt a heavy reluctance about doing this—as if having his clothes there, his little personalities, would commit him finally. He made himself move about his room briskly, clearing out his closet, piling things in a heap on his bed. How a man did accumulate traps! His whites would stay here at the hospital. This room was to be his office. A couch would replace his high white bed; he'd have a larger desk. Still, that heaviness in his chest persisted. He'd always had a possessive pride in his room with its "Doctor McNeill" in gold letters on the door. It had been his own; here he had been alone. It was the first room of his very own he'd ever possessed—ever since Derek and Laurie had come to share the nursery when he was fifteen months old. Later, at school, there'd been room-mates. He wished the cottage were a bit larger—that there were two bedrooms. He could smile at Darcey's face should a bride and groom have separate rooms. Darcey had no patience with notions about personal privacy.

Tony gathered up an armful of clothes—several suits, his two overcoats, his dressing-gown. As he passed the garage, he asked Asy, tipped back in a chair against the door frame, to fetch the rest of his clothes down to the cottage.

"You mean to-night, boss?"

"Yes. I'll be busy to-morrow."

"You gwine to wuk to-morrow?"

"Of course, I'm going to work to-morrow. Until noon. Don't be a damned idiot!"

He saw Asy shake his head and shuffle off. Tony knew that he was outraging his wedding. Well, Tony wasn't celebrating. He was hanging on to his self-control like grim death. And work—right up to the last minute—was his best assurance of at least a semblance of poise.

His arms full, Tony had difficulty in getting the cottage door open, and in finding the light switch. Over his hot armful of garments, he surveyed his new home.

What he saw amazed him. Nothing that he had ever seen in the Taylors' cluttered home had prepared him for

the tastefulness and restraint immediately evident here. He looked at Carolyn's handiwork and appraised it, and her, as he might have judged the home of some stranger. Vaguely, he knew that a stranger, indeed—some person unknown to him—had arranged this house. The Carolyn he knew...

The cottage was tiny. A deep, tile-floored porch, and the three small square rooms in a row, the kitchen's size cut to miniature proportions by the little, compact bathroom. But the place had been designed and built to a maximum of efficiency. Bookcases were built under the sills of the wide windows. The bedroom and kitchen walls were really panelled, sliding doors to numerous closets.

The entire place had been cleaned and burnished. The walls gleamed with fresh, cream-coloured plaster, the ivory woodwork was immaculate. The floors shone with wax and polish.

Carolyn had furnished the place sparingly. Tony liked the effect of roominess she had given to the small quarters. In the living-room there was a day bed along one wall; it and a wing-back chair were slip-covered in crisp brown and white checked gingham, touched up with orange. There was a small mahogany rocking chair. A generous ottoman in front of the screened fireplace. There was a small walnut desk, and a ladder-back chair beside it. On the floor was a plain brown rug, a gay hooked one on the hearth. The curtains, hung on double-sash rods, were plain pongee. That was all. No pillows. No crepe-paper tie-backs. No wall pockets.

Tony dumped his clothes on the day bed and went on to the bedroom. Its doors opened widely into the living-room. Here, too, was space and cleanliness. Two beds—not exact twins—both of them maple, with spool-turned ends. They were covered with quilts, gay with wreaths of morning glories—pink and blue and mauve—upon a creamy background. Tony lifted a corner of one of these coverlets; there was a blanket—a warm, golden pink—fine sheets, and new box springs. He sighed. A good bed. And one of his own.

Tony discovered the wall—cupboards. He touched, gently, Carolyn's frocks that hung there. He looked into the bathroom, fascinated by his discoveries. The little room gleamed with white porcelain and green tile. Heavy towels hung precisely upon the racks—plenty of towels. Tony had a doctor's extravagance with towels. The shower curtain was bright yellow. Glossy green vine leaves hung from a yellow glass ball against the window blinds.

The kitchen was tiny, compact. Tile-floored—every inch of wall space was utilized by cupboards, sink stove, icebox. A small butterfly table of maple, and two ladder-back chairs, were the only movable pieces. A yellow bowl full of red

apples sat on the table. The window curtains were thin and green, crisp as a ruffled leaf of lettuce. Tony explored. This was more fun—it was as exciting as opening packages at Christmas. The dishes were of old pottery, creamy with use. There was, on higher shelves, a service of fine shell-like Haviland china, sprigged with green ivy leaves. Alone on one shelf sat the little teapot and the cups he had bought for Carolyn at the Castilla gift shop. He peered into the icebox. Two grapefruit. Eggs in a yellow bowl. Bacon. Two fat red tomatoes. Lettuce. A small, dressed chicken in a covered bowl. A bottle of milk. A yellow carton of butter. He shut the door, softly, thoughtfully.

He walked slowly back through the house to get his clothes. As he hung them away, he was thinking harder than he had ever done before, in all his hours of thinking about this matter. This house had not been planned carelessly. Carolyn's dreams were here. If only those dreams might have been complete.

All Tony could hope for—all he could promise—was kindness to Carolyn. He would be gentle. It wouldn't be enough. It wouldn't be love. Must he see Carolyn's dreams collapse like a house of cards? Must this little home which she had planned so lovingly become a horror which would mock and jibe at them both? Tony hoped not. He would try very hard....

He was aroused by the sound of Asy grunting and puffing out on the porch. He went to open the screen door.

"Boss, yor wanted."

"I—at the hospital?"

"Yassir. Miss Fleming say do come right away. They's a woman—"

"Okay. Be sure to turn off these lights when you've finished."

Tony didn't run, but his long stride ate up the distance between the cottage and the back door of the hospital. He expected this was Mrs. Langtry; one of his minor concerns had been that she might wait until the middle of the wedding ceremony. Miss Fleming confirmed his guess. "I think she's in a hurry, Doctor."

"Have her taken right in. I'll be there."

Tony whisked out of his shirt and trousers, into duck pants and gown. He was in the delivery-room as soon as the girls had brought the patient in; she was only half-undressed, complaining fiercely of her pain. Tony brought up his gas tanks, his eyes and hands busy with valves and dials. How blessed was work!

The patient's protests subsided to a drowsy murmur. Tony checked pulse and temperature, worked his hands into rubber gloves. Mrs. Reedy finished undressing the woman and made her orthodox in shirt and cap and leggings. She

wiped her face, which was heavily rouged. "She was at a party," the nurse told Tony.

"Yes? Miss Gates had better come along."

"She's ready." The nurse filled a hot-water bottle and put it between the sterile blankets on the side table. Tony hummed a little tune—"Alouette, gentille Alouette"—the labour was going like clockwork. "oh, sa bouche!"

"I don't want a baby," Mrs. Langtry said, clearly. Tony grinned, and the nurse giggled. Mrs. Reedy was a very pretty young woman, her hair like corn silk beneath the tiny starched cap.

A beetle batted against the thick glass of the window. Doctor Gordon opened the hall door; his glasses glittered in the fierce white light. "Okay, Tony?"

"Okay, Chief." Tony was feeling a hundred per cent more cheerful than he had done an hour ago.

"This your bachelor farewell blowout?"

"Uh-huh. Call Gates, will you?"

Tony became busier—there was a smear of red across the breast of his gown. The nurse brought him a sterile, wrinkled one, gave him fresh gloves, tied a mask over his mouth. Miss Gates came in, looking sleepy. The patient groaned.

"Take it easy," the anæsthetist murmured. "First baby?"

"Third. She doesn't want it."

"Then, why bother?"

Mrs. Reedy brought a table of instruments closer to Tony's hands—they had worked together so often that she was able to anticipate each move he would make. She made a swell assistant. The baby struggled into a fierce yell of protest. Tony turned his attention to the mother. "Okay, Miss Gates."

Miss Gates looked up at the clock. "Twelve fourteen."

"Uh-huh. Girl."

He worked over the mother. She'd be playing cards again in two weeks. She'd told Tony that after a dance last fall she and her husband had been a little drunk.... She'd been outspokenly rebellious about having the child.

Tony sighed. The baby was a nice one—fat, with a fuzz of reddish hair. And a twisted foot. Too bad. Things like this made it possible to believe in a personally vengeful God. The baby screamed its protest against life. Tony stood watching it, curiously. Wonderful, how strong they were. How weak, too, of course.

It lay there on the table, screaming, crimson with rage, the crumpled little fists beating the air. Well, she'd have plenty to cry about, poor child. There'd be many times again when she'd curse this night. Her life would not be any easier for the braces and operations, the pain, the humiliations her mother had bequeathed her.

Let her yell! While she could. It must be great to be able to scream that way, unrestrained by custom or precept. Tony felt that one of the chief burdens of maturity could be the convention of repression.

He stripped off mask and gloves, shed his upper gown about his feet. Stepping over it, he went to the basin and washed his hands. Miss Fleming brought in the cart at his signal—they rolled the mother in a blanket, and Tony pushed the equipage down the hall. He helped Miss Fleming put the woman to bed; he wrote briefly on the chart.

"Mr. Langtry is out on the porch."

Tony stopped in his room to put on a fresh gown. He poured himself a glass of water from the carafe on the table.

The father, a gross young man who, town gossip said, supported his family by his winnings at Black Jack, lay in one of the big white porch chairs, asleep and snoring. Tony stood and looked at him—a light burned beside the door. Langtry's face was fat and puffy, his mouth relaxed. Mrs. Langtry was a slim, exquisitely dainty woman. The matter of sex attraction was a major scientific mystery. He touched the father's shoulder.

The man sat up with a snort, blinking his little pig eyes at Tony. "Eh? Oh, it's you, Tony!"

"Yes."

"Er—er—" Langtry fumbled for a cigar. "How's Letty?"

"Okay. Baby's here. A girl."

"A girl? Well, you ain't got much choice." Langtry chuckled, a fat, oily sound. Tony's fist clenched. "Letty all right, is she?"

"Yes. Quite."

"Can I see her?"

"If you like—she's still asleep. Throw that cigar away."

Arthur Langtry looked at the fresh cigar; he went over and placed it carefully on the stone balustrade. Tony waited; he didn't feel chatty. He led the way into the hospital, and along the stretches of black and white linoleum. Langtry's feet scuffed behind him. He was puffing. Tony walked more slowly—Langtry was fat because he couldn't walk, or he couldn't walk because he was fat.

Mrs. Langtry lay on her side, sleeping soundly. Arthur looked at her.

"Do you want to see the baby?"

"What? Oh, yes, I guess so."

"Have you a name?"

"You wait and ask Letty."

The nursery was more brightly lit than the hall—there were no other babies just now. Mrs. Reedy was pinning a diaper on the infant. Mr. Langtry grinned foolishly at his daughter. "They all look alike at that age—"

The nurse looked at him oddly. Tony touched the baby—its skin was soft and warm—like the petals of a flower worn over a woman's heart. "She has a clubbed foot. See?"

Arthur Langtry stared at him. "Wha-at?"

"She has a crippled foot. You see... the tendons are—"

"How'd that happen? Was she injured at birth?"

When in doubt, blame the doctor. "Nonsense! You gave her this foot nine months ago."

The father looked at his baby as if she were some monster. "But—I don't want a crippled child." Any statement to jolt this man into sensitiveness! Into pity.

The nurse picked up the sleepy baby, cuddling it to her. "Darling, sweet," she murmured. She put her into the crib; the baby sucked greedily at one of its gauze mittens. Tony smiled, a lump in his throat. "We'd better go, Langtry."

"But, Tony—"

Tony led the way along the halls again, out to the porch. A light rain was falling. You might count each slow drop. "Langtry," the doctor said, "you don't want a crippled baby. You didn't want this baby at all—"

"Well, we have two."

"Yes, you have two. And you made this third one. Don't forget—you and Letty made this baby. If the job isn't such a good one, you can't blame even God. You did it. She's here—you'll have to care for her. Otherwise, she's a strong, lovely child."

Arthur shifted uneasily. "Letty's always said if she had a deformed baby she wouldn't want it to live."

"What Letty wants, and what she gets, seem to differ."

"Yes. Well, I suppose there are things we'll be able to do—specialists—"

"Oh, yes. Later. There are operations—"

"Cost a lot, too, I bet. Don't have any kids, Tony. They cost like hell."

Tony felt a very unprofessional desire to kick this patient's husband down the steps. "Good-night. You can see your wife after ten to-morrow."

"All right." Langtry retrieved his cigar and waddled down the steps—like a baby with a wet didie, Tony thought. He yawned and went inside.

He sat down at the desk to make his report. Miss Fleming brought him a glass of milk and sandwich.

Tony looked at his watch. Two o'clock. Dawn pretty soon—his wedding day. He stopped short, his hand on the door-knob of his room. The gold letters on the oak panel blurred before his eyes. He was sleepy—only, really, he wasn't. He'd never been more wide awake. More aware of himself and the load of apprehension he was carrying.

Tony sighed. He longed to be free, longed for the old

days when he might be a doctor and nothing else. He thought regretfully of the long hours he had spent as hospital interne. If only he need not go through that terrible ceremony. If he and Carolyn could just be married—if they need only take up their married life, without these hateful preliminaries. Tony understood why bridegrooms wanted to get drunk the night before their weddings. Civilised, Christian marriage was a shameful, barbaric rite.

A man and a woman put on their best clothes and stood up in public and promised to sleep together, to confine their physical desires to each other... No! He wasn't crazy! The first cause of matrimony, the Prayer Service said, was procreation. Well, of course it was. Or had been before the doctrine of contraception was so generally subscribed to. All right, start over—the first cause of matrimony was cohabitation. You had a ring and a legal paper to make it respectable.

Tony didn't hear Miss Fleming's knock. She came into the room, her flashlight touching his white overall as he sat there. "Oh, Doctor——"

"What is it?"

"Miss Hart says Miss Kearney is failing."

"I'll come."

"I hated to disturb you——"

"It's all right. I hadn't gone to bed."

He hurried to the other end of the building, his stethoscope dangling in his hand. The special nurse stepped aside from the bed. Tony bent over the old lady, so wasted and frail that her bones scarcely lifted the sheet. His fingers could find no pulse at all; he adjusted the stethoscope.

"She'll need the priest," he said. Miss Hart turned and went out silently. Tony drew a chair up to the bedside and watched the dying woman. The room, spotlessly clean and in order, smelled of death. A dry, dusty smell, such as you'll find between the pages of old, old books, spotted yellow with age.

Miss Hart came back. She was stout, efficient. Matronly, though still in her early twenties. The other nurses, for some obscure reason, called her Jack. She cleared the few articles from a small table, spread it with a clean towel. The woman in the bed lay as if already dead, her face blue-white, the features sharpened, the eyeballs showing rims of white below the paper-thin lids. A small breeze wandered in through the open window—dawn was in the air.

The priest came—a black-Irish priest, aggressive, militant. Gordon had said that he'd been shell-shocked during the war. He made Tony think of a fisty black-and-tan terrier. He came in now, briskly.

"T-t-t. A saint is leaving us!" Tony got up from his chair. He doubted that the aged spinster had been a saint. "Well, Doctor, when science fails, God steps in."

The priest opened his little satchel. His whisper filled the silent room as a shout could not have done. Tony watched the familiar ritual. Sometimes it had mystery and beauty—not this morning. Tony sighed. So much fuss over a peaceful death. So much fear and last-minute preparation. Some deaths—not this one—were fearful struggles. Some were as sad as the wilting of a lovely flower. Always, death was a release. A great rest and silence. *God giveth His beloved sleep.*

Tony stepped to the bed... bent his long back... listened intently. He met the priest's eyes. Nodded. Out of doors, a rooster crowed. The young doctor felt tired and stiff.

The relatives had to be spoken to. Then, Father Kelly never wanted the dead disturbed for an hour or so, hospital rules to the contrary. Oh, dear!

Doctor Gordon was coming down the hall, as pink and white and brisk as if the hour were a much more human one than four-thirty. Tony went to meet him. "Kearney," he said. "And Kelly doing the usual."

"I'll settle him. You look like a long night."

"The Langtry baby has a club foot."

"Oh, hell!"

"Yes. Miss Kearney died at four-twenty-one. Senile pneumonia?"

"You should know. You'd better get a little rest. A birth, a death—and marriage, eh?"

Tony nodded. "Yes. I fancy so." His voice wavered with fatigue.

He went out to the main desk and hunted for a death certificate. He ran it into the typewriter, got up again to fetch Miss Kearney's file. It was a thick one—she'd often been a patient at Westwood. Tony tapped out the details with one finger. He hoped—this tired, early morning—that he'd not live to be eighty-six. Lord, he'd forgotten the undertaker. He reached for the telephone and put in the call.

Gordon came and looked over his shoulder. Tony could feel his eyes studying him. "You'd better get some rest, son. You'll look like the devil at your own wedding."

"Oh, nobody looks at the groom. Just so he's *there*."

"Go to bed. Leave that file out—it's closed now."

"Yes, sir. You might make the return on the Langtry baby. Send them together to the Registrar." Tony felt as if he were talking in his sleep.

"Yes, yes. Go to bed!"

"Okay." He'd shower first—he felt sticky and uncomfortable in the clothes he'd worn all night. He got his pyjamas and went to the bathroom. He decided to take a hot tub; he undressed slowly. His shorts ripped as he pulled them off. He should have bought himself some new clothes. He had an abundance of plain, strong muslin

drawers and pyjamas—not very bridal. He felt his skin go hot and prickly. Lord, he might be a callow youth of twenty. He stepped into the tub of hot water, and did it feel good!

There wasn't much use in his going to bed—he had the Saturday clinic and his rounds. The best way to combat this idiotic feeling of apprehension was to keep good and busy. If he were tired enough—even more tired than he was now—he'd sleep-walk through the afternoon. He wished he had remembered—had had the thought and kindness—to buy a present for Carolyn. Not anything expensive—she knew that he wasn't a rich man—but he might have given her something. Girls thought little attention of that sort were important, liked to show such gifts to their friends. Some trifling piece of jewellery would have pleased her out of all proportion to its value. Damn his eyes, he'd been so selfish it served him right if he now found himself on the anxious seat.

Asy's black head peered around the door, a blot on the white paint. "Come on, boss."

"What now?"

"A man—he's yellin' wiv pain. Doctah say come."

"Get me some clean pants and a gown, then."

"Yassir."

Well, if work was what Tony wanted—and even if it wasn't—there seemed to be plenty of it on tap. Gordon came in to change, and told Tony that a man had come in with an appendix. He'd drunk a pint of neat whisky during the night for cramps. Tony whistled.

"Will you take him up, Tony? He's in seventeen."

"Okay."

Tony pushed the cart to seventeen's door. A group of frightened people clustered about in the hall. He knew them all, well; but he showed recognition of no one. "May I get through, please?"

Two nurses worked to undress and prepare the groaning man. Andy Curran, owner of the creamery. Tony took the syringe and administered the morphine. He prepared the surface. With the girls helping, he lifted the heavy man to the cart. "Shut up, Andy—that hypo stopped the pain."

It wasn't harsh to speak so. Andy, crazy with pain and whisky and morphine, could best understand a brief, sharp order. "I'll take him up." Tony told the girls.

He paused a moment in the hall to let Mrs. Curran kiss her husband. Andy was dangerously sick, and she knew it. Andy knew it, too—his light-blue eyes were terrified.

Within ten feet of the elevator Tony stopped the cart again, abruptly, and put his body where its bulk would hide from Andy the sight of the undertaker's men, and the basket they carried. A parade of that sort would not help

the sick man any just now. The side door slammed softly, and Asy came to help Tony get the cart on the elevator—there never was an inch of leeway—and to pull on the rope.

The girls—bless 'em—had the operating room ready. Tony surrendered Andy to them, and went to scrub up. Gordon was there beside him; their stiff brushes rasped in rhythm. Water rushed, sterilizers hissed and cracked. Tony's nose quivered to the sweet, heady smell of ether. Andy's breathing was loud—slow and laboured. With all that alcohol, he took his time about going under.

The delicate operation took twenty-five minutes, and Andy Curran was alive. Tony walked over to the bell and pushed it twice. He tipped his cap forward, and took the end of the cart. "I'll stay around," Gordon called. "Get your breakfast."

Tony saw the man into his bed, went out to a talk to Mrs. Curran in the sunroom. Andy would need a special.

The night nurses were hurrying to finish their duties. Tony could smell bacon, and his stomach clamoured for breakfast. But he went to both desks, and looked at each chart.

In his room again, he put on a fresh shirt, clean duck pants, and changed his shoes. His feet were tired. He'd been on them steadily for twenty-four hours. He sat down at his desk; his eyes felt gritty. Still, he was glad that the Saturday clinic would keep him busy all morning.

Doctor Flannery usually saw half of these patients, referring the surgical cases he encountered to Gordon. Tony, with Tom's other duties, had taken over the entire Saturday clinic. He'd rather enjoyed doing, too. To-day, he was truly glad that these simple people and their ills would be there to help occupy these last slow hours.

He would be dead tired by night.

Tony fumbled for his handkerchief and blew his nose. As if summoned by the blast, Asy came in with the breakfast tray. "I told Miss Esthah to fix a good breakfast fo' you, boss. I tol' her we ben wukin' all night."

Tony gave his full attention to his tray. A big glass of orange juice. A stack of hot buttered toast under one silver cover. A hot plate of Canadian bacon, sliced thick and slowly cooked under another. A pot of tea. A jar of marmalade. Tony was famished. A year or so ago, he'd had a sandwich.

Miss Dulaney knocked on his open door. Tony looked over his shoulder. "Morning, Miss Dulaney."

"Good-morning, Doctor. Mrs. Langtry's chart says you want to take the baby to her. She's asking to see it."

"Oh, yes!" Tony wiped his mouth, and got up. "We had a full night."

"Yes. Is the baby——"

"Club foot. Cute little thing."

"Poor baby."

Tony went with the nurse into the next room, the nursery. The Langtry baby looked at him out of wide blue eyes. It had a heart-shaped face, and its hair, now that it was dry, lifted in a little reddish swirl on the top of its head. Some babies are red and wrinkled when they are first born. This one was not.

Miss Dulaney opened Mrs. Langtry's door, and Tony went in. The room was darkened against the morning sun. The mother's head turned on the pillow. "Hello, Tony. Oh, you've the baby. Nurse says it's a girl."

"Yes. We've named her Mehitabel." He deposited blanket and baby beside the mother, turned back the sheet and probed her abdomen. Mrs. Langtry pushed at his hand—it never made him stop. When he was quite through, he stepped back and watched the mother pull the blanket away from the baby's face.

"She's fair."

"Yes. Sweet."

"All my babies are tow-headed."

Tony leaned against the chair back. "I want you to nurse her, Mrs. Langtry."

"Now, don't begin that, Tony. Because I won't do it."

"Yes. It's important that you should. She'll need all the breaks she can get."

Letty's eyes darkened. "What—— Is anything wrong with her?"

Tony came up to the bed, folded back the pink blanket, and took the twisted little foot in his hand. As gently as he could, he explained. Letty was not heart-broken, as she might well have been; she was frightened and ashamed and angry. She showed no pity for the baby. Tony realized that some mothers do not regard their newborn infants as human personalities.

"It's all Arthur's fault," Letty stormed. She wasn't listening to a thing Tony said.

"Why?"

"Well, there's never been any one crippled in my family."

"Is there in his?"

"I don't know, but there must be. These things don't just happen."

"But—you know—they do! Perhaps you didn't eat the right food. I distinctly remember that you refused to drink milk——"

"And get as fat as a cow! What are we going to do with her?"

"Be awfully good to her. Love her a lot. And feed her mother's milk."

"I won't. I hate the very idea."

"If you don't, you'll have all Darcey saying you've neglected her."

Letty began to cry. Tony hadn't a bit of remorse. He had no scruples against juggling medical facts and harnessing the Darcey dragon for a purpose as good as this one. "Just you wait, Tony McNeill," the disappointed, angry woman sobbed. "Just you wait till you have a baby that looks like Jim Taylor. You'll be sorry you ever married!"

Tony felt his hands go wet. He licked his lips, controlled his voice with an effort, made it remain the cool, dispassionate tone he customarily used to patients. "Miss Dulaney will help you get the baby to nurse. Now, be good, Mrs. Langtry. You won't be sorry."

He went out into the hall, leaned against the open door. He was suffocating; his limbs were like jelly. If he had the strength, he would like to run—as far and as fast as he could.

The dressings were routine that day, but it was almost ten o'clock when Tony finished them. Going downstairs, he could see a crowd in the waiting-room of Flannery's office. The farmer-patients came to the hospital escorted by whole families. They sat gingerly upon the strange chairs, spoke in awed whispers, their wide eyes curious and puzzled. Tony passed through the room with a brisk "Good-morning!" The day was beastly hot, and the air of the waiting-room was acrid with body sweat.

He washed his hands and sat down at the desk. Miss Riley brought him the little heap of cards. Not many, but enough. There were two more hours to be filled.

Miss Riley looked tired; her face was white, her eyes circled with dark rings. Tony hadn't known much of this girl until he took over Tom's office, and her with it. "Heat getting you?" he asked her, reaching for her wrist.

"I'm all right."

"You don't look all right, and your pulse says you're lying."

"I—I'm afraid I'm pregnant."

The statement plumped out so unexpectedly that Tony swung sharply around in his chair and looked at the nurse. "I didn't know you were married." Now, that was a dumb thing for him to say.

"I am, Doctor. I have been for a year."

"Oh."

"I've kept it—a secret—because Doctor Gordon doesn't like us to be married."

"Well, of course, he has his own reasons."

"I know. I expect he's right. Only—I want to keep on working."

"Sit down—you seem to be the first patient." Tony smiled at the distressed girl. He wasn't the only one with troubles. "Tell me about it."

The nurse made a nice professional job of her symptoms.

"How old are you?"

"I'm thirty-two."

"Is your husband working?"

"Yes. He's an insurance collector. He's younger than I am."

"Yes." This apparently irrelevant statement was evidently important in its significance to her.

"He's proud of this. I'm not. I hate it! I wish——"

"You know better than that!" Tony's voice was sharp.

"I mean——Oh, why did it happen? This is *my* body. Why should I have to share it? Give up being myself?"

Tony wished he were older; he drew squares on the green desk blotter. "I know. I understand."

"You can't understand! No man can! I—I feel as if I would never be my own self again!"

Tony well knew that pregnant women had their vagaries—he'd learned to listen to them with attention and respect, too. Now he tried sincerely to comfort this woman's distraction. Babies should be wanted. "Nine months doesn't last long—the time is soon over."

"A lifetime isn't." The girl's hands clasped in her earnestness. "I've noticed that mothers are never free of the child they have borne. It—it is as if—you know, Doctor. I read once of prisoners—in Africa, or some place—whose chains had grown to their bodies. I feel like that."

Tony looked at her, his own thoughts claiming him. A lifetime wasn't short—to wear chains. Or even the scars of chains.

Miss Riley stirred in her chair. "What am I going to do, Doctor?"

Tony jerked himself back to a decent attention to her case. "The first thing you have to do is to stop calling that baby of yours names. I'll bet—when I deliver your child six months from now, if I call it a chain you'll be ready to slap me."

She managed a rueful grin. "I just don't see how I'll manage."

"Give that husband of yours a chance to worry about managing. As for yourself—you know, Miss Riley, a mother is given strength when she bears a child, strength and patience and wisdom for its needs. That's where a woman has it over a man. We men have to get along—well——" He slapped the desk. "Shall I examine you?"

"Not now. I—I'll give up my job next week, and—shall I call the first patient?"

"Please." Give her the chance work would afford her to get a hold on herself.

The patients filed into the cool, quiet office. Tony didn't know how Flannery managed, but he refused to let the relatives come in—except in the case of a mother with a child. These people sat in the chair beside the desk and told the doctor their troubles. They got up on the exami-

nation table and off again, like docile children. Tony moved from table to wash-basin, and back to his desk. Some of the cases were trivial. Some of them were serious, or could be.

The last patient was a woman whose symptoms sounded alarming. "I'd like you to rest over Sunday," Tony told her, "and come back at two o'clock Monday. Doctor Gordon will probably want X-rays."

The woman's scream was dreadful. Tony's steady hand shook. Miss Riley cluttered a pan against the sterilizer. "What—Why do you do that?" Tony asked the white, sobbing woman. Her family in the next room probably thought—heavens, what must every one in the hospital think?

"Oh," she wailed. "I am so afraid of cancer."

Well, he would be damned. The woman's trouble was gallstones, if anything. What crazy kink of human ignorance was this? "Why should you think—"

"You said X-ray."

"Yes, I did, but—"

"Then it's cancer. Well, I won't be operated. You just die anyway."

Tony crumpled a piece of paper into a ball and tossed it at the wastebasket. "My dear Mrs. Ferguson . . ."

Pure, stark ignorance can take more of a doctor's strength than a pull delivery. Tony felt a hundred years old when he went to change his clothes to go uptown for a haircut.

For years, Tony was going to be able to remember every detail of that long, busy night and morning before his marriage. From Mrs. Langtry's *strata* to Mrs. Ferguson's terrified scream—he could recall each sound and sight and smell. Nothing unusual had happened in those fifteen hours—not unusual, except that each personality a doctor encounters is different from the next one; each compound of emotions and character varies. No two cases can ever be exactly alike.

Tony had aided in birth and in death, he had done a morning's routine of dressings and diagnoses, he had assisted at an operation. He had seen a score of souls in microscopic cross section. He did this every day. He had seen and done these things many times and forgotten them in detail. He never forgot one minute of these particular hours.

For those fifteen hours he had been lent a clarity of vision. He was able to see too clearly Letty Langtry's vanity, Emma Riley's bondage to life. It was cruel, such understanding—it stripped humankind bare. Then Mrs. Ferguson's scream had anesthetized him into a kind of coma. His limbs and nerves tired until they would not function for themselves, his perceptions blurred by his fatigue, he walked mechanically through the next ten hours, only able to be glad that

so little of his intellect and attention should be needed. He was dead tired—body and soul. His feet could be forced on; his thoughts would not be. Tony had no more need for desire to think.

Without registering a thing he was doing, he ate dinner, and went uptown and had his hair cut. He must have met, and spoken to, several people. He remembered doing nothing of the sort.

He remembered dressing for his wedding. It was stifling hot, and his collar would probably wilt to nothing—though he wasn't at all nervous. He had a sort of numb, resigned feeling. Should he wear a two-tone green tie, or a plain blue one? He decided on the blue. There was a handkerchief to match for his breast pocket—stark-white linen didn't look so well against creamy serge.

He went out to his car at exactly three forty-five. Glancing up at the hospital—in some sort of farewell, he supposed—he'd seen a lot of nurses and Esther, watching him from the windows. They'd done that way once before, when he'd been dressed up for something special. He waved a hand to them and drove away.

He remembered to go into Taylor's yard by the back gate, leave his car before the garage, and enter the house through the kitchen. Those had been his orders, and he obeyed them to the letter. The kitchen was filled with negroes in white jackets, and smelled of mayonnaise. Tony went into the small back hall. The big house hummed like a beehive—voices, and the whir of electric fans.

He put the wedding ring into his right-hand coat pocket. He was ready—there had better be no delay.

He never knew just how he got into the parlour—something to do with the pink rosebud in Jim Taylor's coat lapel—but he found himself standing beside the Methodist preacher, and Carolyn was coming towards him across an empty stretch of carpet. She wore a dress of thin white stuff, and a hat with a wide brim—he could not see her face.

Her small white hand lay coldly across his big warm palm—stained yellow in the creases, in spite of all his scrubbing. The minister cleared his throat . . . the piano sounded softly.

"Dearly beloved . . ."

Tony felt a door closed softly—a door in his life. He heard the key gently withdrawn. Carolyn was trembling. He put his left arm steadily across her shoulders.

Chapter Sixteen

ANOTHER BLISTERING summer, the second successive year of drought. The hot winds seared the sprouting grain. By August, the baked pasture land was turning brown. It

seemed that Nature was conspiring with man's ineptitude, as manifested by the continued demoralization of business, to inflict a meaningless purgatory on Darcey. Half the farmers, as they expressed it, had gone into the not-farming business; but for the three A allotments, many of them would have starved. In Darcey, as in nearby towns, the work-relief gangs improved roads on which fewer and fewer people travelled—it was cheaper to keep the old car in the barn. A dozen outlying townships were tax-delinquent. It seemed as if the whole economy was folding in upon itself. The townships leaned on the county, the county on the state, the state on the federal government.

Tony sensed all these things vaguely and sometimes heard them discussed. But he was a surgeon, very busy at his job, which took on an added onerousness, now that patients who formerly had been able to pay for private service came flooding into the Saturday clinic. A few could have paid, perhaps. But most of them couldn't so that Westwood more and more had to consider ways and means of making both ends meet.

Yet with all this, Tony was able to tell himself, when he thought about it at all, that this was the happiest summer of his life.

He had many things to bring him contentment. Carolyn was an excellent housekeeper—Tony occasionally found her too meticulous. It was a little aggravating, when he was anxious for a swim before dark, to find her unwilling to leave the house until a complicated ritual of clearing away the supper dishes had been performed. Tony once essayed to show her how to hurry the job, and became involved in her system of glass towels, and dish mops, and pan rags, and polishing cloths.

But she kept their little house shining and pretty. She was docile about preparing the abundant food he required, and he knew that her own blossoming prettiness could be traced to good beefsteak and milk, as well as to her joy in being Tony's wife.

She had a sweet new dignity, too, as she assumed her place among the young matrons of Darcey. As Mrs. Anthony McNeill, she had a new, becoming poise and assurance. She was able to meet and talk to people with pride and composure. This pleased Tony.

They quarrelled occasionally—that is, Tony became enraged at some triviality and shouted—but it was impossible to keep up any valid show of wrath with so helpless, so contrite a little thing as Carolyn. Lord, she knew nothing whatever about him—about any man, least of all a doctor. How could she be expected—unless he told her—to know why he must keep such irregular hours, why he was sometimes too tired to do anything but fall into bed, why he was sometimes so keyed up that he could not sleep?

She admired his work extravagantly. She looked upon the healing of the sick very much as some girls do when they enter nursing. She idealized it. Idealized the nobility of each thing Tony did. He smiled at her sentimental notions. He might have told her that a large part of any doctor's time is spent ensuring proper bowel and kidney action. He kept still. So long as she fed him, and understood the odd hours he kept, she need know little about the inner workings of the profession.

Tony, who was no revolutionary, knew that he was exercising a very old male prerogative in being glad that his wife had come to him innocent and untouched. Still, her ignorance shocked him deeply. It was fearful to think of a mother who would turn a girl over to a man—a man whom she had professed to think immoral and lustful—with so little preparation for marriage. At the best, a girl had to accept so much. Tony felt that if he ever had a daughter, he'd want to be very sure of the man she married.

Carolyn's prudishness was deep-set. It went beyond her virginity. She had a false modesty which made Tony recall the tales Sybil had used to tell of her two years in the convent at Quebec. Carolyn had no knowledge of her own anatomy, much less that of Tony. She had entered marriage without any knowledge of her womanhood. Apparently she had been ready to expect and accept any bodily outrage. Her mother had told her "it" would be terrible. When Tony asked her if she'd found this to be true, she wouldn't answer him—her face had flooded with radiance which meant she loved him, but she disliked any reference in words to their marital relationship. At night, decently clothed in darkness, sex between husband and wife was fitting and proper. At other times, one must ignore such things.

Tony wanted Carolyn to have a saner, healthier view of herself, of life. He wanted the mother of his children to be a personality of whom he, and they, could be proud. She had, he knew, good basic qualities. It was just that she was bleached white by her mother's overprotectiveness. A child always carried on a pillow does not learn to walk by himself. Carolyn had been shielded from life; she'd been heaped round—like endive or celery—by the manure and sand of genteel prohibitions and restrictions. The warm sunlight of truth would do much to bring her viewpoint to a healthy colour, just as her cheeks were getting pink and her grey eyes luminous from orange juice and good roast beef.

Carolyn, Tony told himself, in these analytical moments, was not pretty, but, here again, she had many good points. Her hair had the silky fineness of good breeding, and her bones were beautifully made—points Tony could appreciate. He embarrassed her by saying that her wrists and ankles

were perfectly articulated. She mistrusted any mention of the human body. And Tony lived by, for, and on the vagaries of that very organism. At times, it seemed to him that the breach between them was very wide—almost too wide for the effort it would take to span it.

Socially, Tony's life took on a great and complete change with his marriage. His old crowd could never accept Carolyn—he had no slightest desire to continue the rackety parties he had known with them. Honestly, he felt very little regret at giving up these friends. He went twice a month to the meetings of the Medical Society, otherwise he did the things he might do with Carolyn. They went to the movies. They took short drives in the car—Tony had an Englishman's love for picnics. They took walks together—long tramps on country roads, a brisk trot along the streets of the town. He made her buy flat-heeled shoes and a pleated skirt. Darcey grew used to the sight of the two of them, and their dog, out for a walk, their car idling in the garage.

Carolyn took more part in the social life of Darcey than Tony was able or inclined to do. As the daughter of her mother, as an ex-school teacher, and the wife of a doctor, she had every claim to a prominent place in Darcey cultural life. Tony was amused and tolerant of her absorption in these matters, smiled at the airs she had taken on as a young married woman. Having abandoned his own social connections, he felt that she had every right to her selection of friends and interests.

On rare occasions he dressed and went soberly to church with her. Church, in Darcey, was a social obligation rather than a spiritual one. Carolyn went regularly. Tony was usually busy, but when he did go, she was very pleased. And proud. However, when she asked him, timidly, if he would ever sing in church—he had such a beautiful voice—he shouted at her in anger out of all proportion to the request. He might have abandoned his friends and his old habits, have given up cocktail parties and other hilarities, but he was not yet ready to sing in a Methodist choir. So he told her not to be a damned fool.

By way of penance for this outburst, he made himself listen patiently to her account of Better Films Council meetings. He came home one evening to find her frowning over one of his big medical books. He took it away from her. "What now?"

She had, she said, been asked to prepare a paper on "Trends in Modern Medicine." In God's name, was there any subject on which she knew less? She explained timidly—it always frightened her when he swore—that she'd been given the subject because Tony was a doctor.

Darcey logic, unadulterated. As if the knowledge of medical matters were contagious, like measles. But he'd

help her—just let him think. . . . He realized at once that he knew too much on the subject, would be too technical—he had no talent for reducing his knowledge to lay terms. He sent for a couple of popularizations, both accurate and intelligible, and helped Carolyn prepare her paper. It was a big success.

Tony had no complaints with his life as Carolyn was helping him live it. He knew that he was not an intellectual young man, given to worries over frustration and repressions. He was too busy to fret whether or not he might be expressing himself to the best advantage.

He was the sort of animal who really likes to work, and after work is done for the day, likes the sort of home and relaxation which will best fit him for more work on the next day. He liked the sense of physical contentment Carolyn gave him. He liked the animal comfort of his home. He enjoyed the relaxation of a brisk walk, an amusing movie—they satisfied him quite as much as a noisy party or a passionate interlude. Perhaps this meant he was growing old? Let it. He knew that he was happy and contented these days, that his work was being done well.

Perhaps it was selfish to be grateful, chiefly, that his life with Carolyn afforded an ideal accommodation to his profession. But he knew that Carolyn was happier now, married to him, than she had ever been in her life. Happier in her home, doing her club work, enjoying a social prestige and popularity which had never before been hers. Sometimes he found himself smiling at her smugness over being a married woman. With her, to have married in so satisfactory a manner was the greatest prize life could offer. And though Tony might laugh at her contented "But I'm your wife," he liked hearing her say it.

He'd almost forgotten the doubts and fears which had beset him before his marriage. They seemed very absurd now. Everything had worked out so well—so unbelievably well. Carolyn was all any man could ask of a wife.

The old Tony—that Tony which he hoped he had abandoned for ever—might have scorned the simple life he now led. A life so simple as to be dull—except that Tony enjoyed buying rosebushes, and planting them, and worrying about them. He liked the games of backgammon he had with Carolyn in their little living-room. Tony was a scientific player of backgammon, but his wife had an unholy knack of throwing the exact number she needed to spot him, and her ability to throw doubles was suspicious. He liked these things—in them, simple and dull as they might be, there lurked no shameful possibilities, nor danger.

He felt now very firmly established in his home and in his profession. He hoped that nothing would occur to disturb his life's placid stream. There were no whirlpools

here, no rapids over which a man might plunge to dishonour and disgrace. Here he had all he was ever going to ask of life—peace, personally; professionally, a chance to work as hard and as well as he was able to do.

Carolyn's contacts with the hospital were slight. She never set foot beyond their own immediate stretch of lawn, except when she went to the garage for the car. Sometimes, in the evening, nurses off duty but on call—Tony had to explain these terms to Carolyn—would stroll down across the lawn and look at Carolyn's flowers. They were friendly enough, but shy of intruding upon the junior surgeon's privacy. Hospital discipline and its caste system are rigid institutions. Carolyn tried to be friendly with the girls when they came, but she hadn't much in common with them.

Of Doctor Gordon, she stood frankly in terror. She had heard the fantastic tales which were classic in the town, of the chief's temper and his harsh tongue. She went out of her way to evade any meeting with him. She acted as if he were some monster from another planet, his actions unpredictable by human standards. She was completely sure that Doctor Gordon was possessed of none of the more human emotions. She admired her husband tremendously for his complete lack of fear in the presence of this ogre. She listened with pride to Tony's breezy "Okay, Chief," over the telephone. His voice hadn't one tone of intimidation. Tony couldn't laugh her out of this exaggerated feeling.

One evening, when they had been married a month or more, Gordon came strolling down towards the stretch of lawn which Tony had decided to measure and stake off for a tennis court.

He—the chief—wore a light seersucker suit, very neat. Tony knew that he himself was disreputable, in grass-stained duck pants and a torn undershirt. At sight of their eminent visitor, Carolyn's hand went to her hair. She spoke hurriedly to Tony. "If Doctor Gordon is coming to call, you'll have to clean up."

Tony felt one of his childish impulses to resist Carolyn's orders. He glanced up from where he was kneeling on the grass. "Hi, Chief!" he greeted Gordon. "How are you at digging holes?"

Doctor Gordon smiled. His whole face lit up when he did. "Good-evening, Mrs. McNeill. Well, Tony, I think I am probably quite good, but not very deep."

Tony squinted along his tapeline. "No good, then. I want a deep hole-digger-downer."

"What is this—er—project?"

"Tennis court."

"Oh?"

"Yeah—grass court. But it will want posts, and post holes."

"I see. Do you play tennis, Mrs. McNeill?" Gordon was so benign he was positively fatherly.

Carolyn was in a flutter. Tony wanted to shake her. "I—no—Mother said my heart..."

Tony stood up and scowled at her. Of all the asinine things to say to Gordon! "Whatever else your mother may be, Carrie, she's no doctor. Your heart is as steady as a rock. Gordon, how d'you mix cement? And is cement the same as concrete?"

"My dear Tony, I haven't the slightest idea."

"A fat lot of help you are. It's something about one, two, three. You know—wheelbarrowsful. One of water, and two of cement, and three—darned if I know what the third would be—sand, do you suppose?"

Gordon laughed. "I expect you'd better do a little research."

"Yeah. Wonder how plaster would do. I'm a bear at mixing that. And it sets pretty hard."

"I'd ask an expert's advice."

"This is my very own project."

"You're not going to dig holes and mix cement, I hope." His voice indicated that Tony was not.

Tony looked at his hands, which were grubby. "You're right. I'm not."

"He's so afraid of a scratch," Carolyn offered, in the tone women use to tell how silly their husbands are. "He's just a baby."

Gordon looked at her coldly, and his voice crackled. "Just a surgeon, you mean, my dear. A scratch on his hand might well mean its loss to Tony. He . . ."

Tony caught the chief's eye, and he shut up. Fetching a chair from the porch for Gordon, he went on with the pacing and measuring. Gordon sat and fondled Wullie's ears. He always growled fiercely at Mrs. Taylor.

"Whom are you going to play tennis with?" Gordon persisted. He was making fun of Tony, which Carolyn saw and resented. Tony was glad to give him the chance.

"Don't you play?"

"My old bones creak, at the thought."

Carolyn said, politely, that she knew Doctor Gordon was not old.

"Well, Flannery plays, I'll bet a dime," Tony said hastily.

"Hm—probably. Flannery comes home the first of September. I've a picture of Judith encouraging him to spend his winter evenings playing tennis with you."

Tony glared at him, threw his tape measure to the ground in a pet. Wullie retrieved it nicely. They all laughed. "You're the doggonedest crôpe-hanger," Tony told Gordon. "Why don't you stay at the hospital where you belong?"

This shocked Carolyn. She didn't know how much the chief liked Tony's cheerful impudence. Tony stretched out on the ground with Wullie, using him for a pillow. Gordon frankly envied them. Wullie, the little black Scottie Sybil had sent them for a wedding present. Tony told him that being able to have a dog was one of the compensations of marriage. And then felt ashamed of himself—it wasn't being loyal to Carolyn, to talk cryptically, and beyond her understanding.

Carolyn was proud of Wullie, however. Proud of being able to say the dog had been a gift from her husband's sister, Lady Chart. A harmless enough diversion—repeating that titled name—but one of the things Tony shouted about in anger.

Gordon smiled, polished his eyeglasses, and looked at the two of them in benignant approval. "Tony," he said abruptly, "have you any money saved?"

Tony looked up, surprised. "Why, yes, sir. About two thousand dollars."

Both he and Carolyn knew that they had two thousand, one hundred and seventy-four dollars, and thirty-seven cents. They'd spoken of it only the day before—discussing insurance policies.

"Would you be interested in owning a part interest in Westwood Hospital?"

Tony gulped. He saw Carolyn's thin hands press together in excitement. "I—is that—an academic question, sir?"

"It is not. Tom and I think you deserve a bigger salary. You work hard, and your obstetric department has increased the hospital income. I had an idea that you would like to put your salary increase into the purchase of—say—a fourth interest in the business."

Tony felt cold. A dream shouldn't come true suddenly like this—with him in a ragged undervest, and grass-stained sneakers. He was glad the increasing darkness hid some of his expression from Gordon's clear eyes. Still, he wished the chief might know how much the offer meant to him, not only the chance to own part of his beloved hospital—Westwood was already his, every brick and splinter of it. But this evidence that Gordon trusted him, wanted him as an acknowledged partner, his name with Gordon's and Flannery's on the hospital stationery—it meant that he had lived down all that old trouble, had done so with enough dignity and manhood to satisfy the chief. It meant that his marriage had accomplished what he had meant it to do—had made him the sober, trustworthy person he wanted to be.

"Tony——" Carolyn prompted softly.

Tony rubbed his hands down his trouser legs. "I—the chief knows my answer, Carrie. He knows that I'd work

for nothing rather than give up a chance to own a piece of Westwood."

"Well, your wife might not endorse such an extreme," Gordon said dryly. He was polishing the devil out of his glasses. Words weren't needed between them. Gordon knew what Tony was thinking.

Tony buried his face against Wullie's coat. "Thanks, Chief."

"All right, Tony. I'll have the papers drawn up tomorrow."

"I hope—I hope you'll always be glad you've done this, sir. It means a lot to me."

"Yes. I know that it does. Next summer, I think, you can plan on going to London. You've been abroad, haven't you, Mrs. McNeill?"

They talked politely together. Tony lay on the grass, looking at the stars, vowing that nothing, nothing in the world should ever blot out the pride of this evening.

At the announcement of his engagement to Carolyn Taylor, Tony had been glad enough to have Tom Flannery's, mocking eyes and witty tongue safely in Denver. He was dreading Tom's return, but supposed that ordeal would be no worse than others he had survived.

Tom, the morning after his return to Darcey, was waiting for Tony on the steps of the diet-kitchen entry. He watched the tall, white-clothed figure walk, briskly, the full distance of lawn and drive.

"Hallo, Tom."

Tom seized him by the shoulders and turned him full into the early sunlight. "M-hm-n," he said said judiciously "Good colour. Eyes clear. Pulse steady. Put on a little weight, too, I think?"

Tony laughed helplessly. "Don't be an ass. Save your bedside manner for the cash customers. Glad you're back, Tom. I've stirred up a mess of nervous headaches for you."

"I knew I could count on you, Tony. So marriage is okay, is it?"

"It's—swell."

"Good as that, eh? You didn't go and switch girls on me?"

Tony shook his head. "I married Carolyn, and I like it."

Tom grinned. "But it surprised you a little bit, too, didn't it?"

Tony was furious to know his cheeks were going red. "Cut it, Tom, will you?"

"All right, kid. Judith gave me my orders, too. I will admit you're looking a damn sight better than you did this time last summer."

Last summer? Oh, yes. As short a time ago as that?

"I feel better too," Tony mumbled, going into the cool, dark building.

"Gimme a once-over, Curly. Know anything new?"

"You like the 'lectric razor? I don't know a thing."

"Hear Mike Doyle's leaving town."

"Yeah. He's been retired. Goin' to California to live. Can't sell that big house, though."

"Nobody wants a big place like that nowadays."

"Darcey been kinda quiet with his girl gone."

"I guess somebody'll take her place."

"I wonder. She had something, that girl. By all the rules she ought to have gone to hell, one way or another."

"But she didn't."

"Nope. Winds up married to Joe Taylor, just about the toughest and smartest guy this town ever turned out. That boy always had something, too, although God knows where he got it from."

"They're in Peru, I hear. What d'ya know about Peru, Curly?"

"Not a damn thing, and don't care. Once this damned New Deal takes the brakes off business, I got a little property . . ."

Another Christmas came to Darcey—and another Christmas dance. Miraculously, during the preceding week, the town roused itself from its lethargy. Again the stores were crowded. If the people who thronged the streets were less gay than usual, it was scarcely noticeable. And in the hospital, patients and nurses alike generated the usual hum of holiday preparation. Gordon was away until after the holidays—always his absence had the effect of relaxing slightly the customary severities of hospital discipline.

"How about a little party the night before Christmas?" The suggestion, as usual, came from the irrepressible Tom Flannery. Would Tony go, and Mrs. Tony? . . . Tony hadn't touched a drop of hard liquor since his lamentable experience while ushering in that other New Year, and his first reaction was to turn the invitation down flat. But to his surprise, Carolyn was rather firmly disposed to accept.

"It will do you good, Tony," she assured him. "You've been working terribly hard."

"Yes, and you'd maybe like to have a look-in at one of Darcey's wild parties."

Carolyn blushed. "It won't be so wild, will it, Tony? Judith—I like her so much."

Somewhat dubiously, Tony shrugged and consented.

There were about a dozen people in the Flannery living-room when they arrived. There were drinks, and plates of sandwiches, and Christmas cookies on a table set against the wall. Tony took three sandwiches and stood watching

Ted Dameron make a mess of a swell bridge hand. Tony did not hesitate to tell him what he did that was wrong. He also announced that there weren't three people in Darcey who could play contract.

A Christmas tree stood in the recess of the bay window—an old-fashioned Christmas tree. Judith admitted that she couldn't get any thrill out of an all-white tree, or blue and silver effects. She thought Christmas trees should be all colours—perfectly Dutch.

Stephen Flannery had been given a machine gun for Christmas, an ingenious toy which shot real bullets. Unwisely, he had left this weapon where his parents' guests could find it and play with it. The men were soon down on the floor, squabbling for their turn to shoot. One or two of the girls joined them. Because they added cocktails to their natural high spirits, they began to aim at the balls of the Christmas tree. It was fun, and nobody's aim was good enough to do any great damage to the targets. Tony potted a red glass bird and was acclaimed as expert marksman. Judith crowned him with a holly wreath snatched from the window; the red ribbon dangled down behind Tony's ear, and Tony made a speech. He struck an attitude and pointed out that his success was due to a total abstinence from alcoholic liquor. Tom said something should be done about that—he'd get Tony some beer.

Tony laughed and sauntered into the sunroom to look at the goldfish in the big window aquarium. Dumb things, fish. They made a lovely pattern, though—gleaming scales, pale-green water, dark-green feathers of moss.

"Did any one ever try to eat a goldfish?" he asked Tom, taking his bottle of beer from the tray.

"You'd get what Asy calls a-stute in-di-gestion," Tom laughed. "I'll open that—hold everything!"

Drinking directly from a freshly opened beer bottle takes finesse—and elbow room. Tony had none of the latter. He backed hastily to save his clothes from the cascading foam, and crashed into the aquarium. It went over with a wet-smack—a mess of water and flapping fish and slimy moss. Every one jumped to his rescue—squealing and shouting, they made a fearful row. Miraculously, the tank had not been broken, and most of the fish were found and restored to what was left of the water. They swam dazedly about. The floor was awash, and Tony's trousers were soaked. Moss clung to him in limp ribbons. He shook one leg miserably.

"Tony, come in here to the fire—you'll catch cold."

"He has to clean up that mess," Judith declared tucking up her long skirts.

She found a string mop and a bucket. Tony went to work swabbing the floor. "Anchors aweigh!" he sang, loudly, and very flat indeed. The crowd joined in lustily, even Carolyn.

The telephone rang persistently over their clamour. Judith's call came like a siren. "To-o-om! Telephone!"

Tom grunted, strolled out to the hall. He came back on the run. "Tony! Come on! Hospital's on fire!"

Chapter Seventeen

BEFORE ANY one could speak, they were out of the house, into Tom's car, without their hats or overcoats, hurtling down the drive, bouncing over the bricks of Trask Avenue. Tony strained his eyes to see, dreading to see, a glow of fire in the east. This couldn't happen. This mustn't happen! Not to a hospital—not to his hospital!

The place was, at first glance, as it always was at this hour of night. A light burning in the cavern of the front porch, the icy lawn stretching down to the street. But... The doors stood open, people ran along the halls, lights were on—too many lights for the hour. Tom whirled the sedan around the drive on two skidding wheels, and they sucked in their breath to see flames, to smell smoke. "The whole damn roof!" Tom said clearly. Tony couldn't speak. He could only run on legs like pipe cleaners, on feet weighted with lead. This was a nightmare. He was asleep. He'd wake up. Meanwhile, he must struggle. .

Hours later, Miss Geller told them what had happened. She had gone into the diet kitchen about eleven o'clock to start the coffee for the lunch which she and Miss Fleming ate at midnight. She had found fire crackling around the chimney.

Her first thought was not to alarm the patients—that was automatic. But it took a minute to decide whom to call first to her aid. The nurses off duty were asleep upstairs—Miss Fleming would send for the fire department and the doctors. She ran downstairs and told Fleming; she flew up to the third floor and roused one of the nurses—flames were to be heard there, too, and there was a lot of smoke...

By the time the two doctors got to the hospital—and it hadn't taken them three minutes—the nurses had the carts out, and piles of blankets ready. Tom sent John Oliver—only half-awake, and as dumb as mud—across the street to get the boarding-houses open and ready to take in the patients. Tony, after a glance, saw that the main stairway and elevator were in danger of being cut off from use. The fire trucks were roaring up out in front. He raced upstairs, to the third floor, to be sure the girls were all out.

"Put on shoes and a coat—don't stop for another thing!" he shouted. He had to lift Mrs. Reedy bodily out of her bed, and slap her awake. Maternity nurses sleep more soundly than most.

Downstairs again. . . . Thank God, all but two of the surgicals could walk if they had to. Tom would attend to the paralytic on the first floor. Tony cautioned the fire chief about the ether. . . . Were the doors of the X-ray room closed? . . . It was fireproof.

He was conscious of little actual feeling—he still moved as if in a dream, cursing his bodily slowness, the material barriers of long halls and flights of stairs. He was aware of neither smoke nor water—driven frantically by the need to get every patient downstairs and outside. He worked plodding, taking each bed in turn, trusting no faculty but his eyes and his hands—when they showed him that a room was empty, he closed the door and ran to the next one.

Within much less than an hour, every patient was out of the hospital. Willing townspeople carried them across the street. The firemen soon declared the fire out, though water still cascaded into the third-floor windows and down the stairs. Everything in the dormitory was ruined; half the rooms on the second floor were water-soaked. The fire had eaten into the sunroom and diet-kitchen walls; a great hole gaped in the roof.

Tony stood on the cinder turn-table looking up at the building, ablaze with lights, shades gone from many of the windows—or drunkenly awry. His face and arms were black, his coat off, his shirt torn, his trousers stained and frozen as stiff as boards. He brushed the hair back from his face with a sooty hand. "W-w-w-we're d-d-damn lucky!" he chattered to Tom. Words shook on his tongue like dice on a box.

"You get in where it's warm," Tom cried. "You're frozen!"

Tony tried to grin—silly to be scared now. Everything was over. Sillier still to be sick at his damned stomach. Tom led him over to the boiler-room and pushed him inside. "Asy, find him a coat or something. I'll get a drink for him."

Knowing that nothing more could be done that night, Tony found a delicious comfort in going home to the little house, in finding Carolyn there, curled up in the big chair by the fire, no word of censure on her tongue for the smell of whisky on his breath, the filth he brought home on his person. It was delicious to get into a hot bath, to wrap himself in a woolly robe and drink milk and eat cookies there on the hearth rug, his bare toes digging into Wullie's thick coat, and talk the fire over with his wife.

"This will hit Gordon hard," Tony said, over and over.

Next morning, early, Tony went back to the job of getting the hospital into a usable shape. He made Carolyn come with him; She was to help the nurses check their losses, help them make plans to live while their dormitory was being rebuilt.

"Of course, you can do it!" he checked her murmur of protest. "The hospital's nothing to be afraid of—never was. We need you. You belong up there. This thing happened to you just as much as it happened to Tom and Gordon and me. Did you know that Judith took a lot of the nurses home to their house to sleep last night? You come along. When I remember how you handled the emergency of that bus accident.

"But, Tony, I hadn't time to think, to realize..." She was skipping in her effort to keep up with his long strides.

"Well, you won't have time to think this morning, either. Gosh, what a mess!"

Gordon would be back in town at eleven o'clock. Tom and Tony worked valiantly those four hours to restore order to what certainly was a mess. All possible patients were sent to their home, some of them with attendant nurses. The others were brought back and made comfortable on the first floor. The nurses, with Carolyn's shy and friendly help, evolved a plan to turn the men's ward into a temporary dormitory. Men were on the roof nailing a tarpaulin in place—permanent repairs would have to await Gordon's word and plans.

Tony and Tom made the brief rounds together. No patient seemed to be the worse for the night's adventure. They were lucky—a hospital fire can be a ghastly thing.

"And we weren't heroes," Tom assured Tony. "Don't go giving yourself airs."

Tony grunted. Rubbed his aching arms. "All the two-hundred-pound patients were on the second floor," he murmured. "I hate to tell the chief. This will hit him hard. Coming home on it cold. He might think we... We did all we could, Tom. Or did we?"

Tom lifted one shoulder. "One of us could have been in the building."

"Oh."

"That's why we aren't heroes."

Tony kept telling himself that the fire would be a serious setback for Westwood. There was insurance, carried heavily for years. Even so, this would mean a backward step, a doing-over rather than a going-forward. A serious block just now. If there were some way—something he could offer the chief in way of compensation...

He went into the pay-telephone booth in the hall and struggled with the difficulties of getting a country number.

Flannery met Gordon's train, took on his shoulders the

unpleasant task of breaking this news to the chief. It would be like telling a father an only son would lose his leg. . . .

Gordon didn't say much—asked if the patients were safe. He got heavily out of the car and stood looking up at the men on the roof. He walked slowly into the building, down the hall, up the stairs. His shoulders sagged, and his face was grey with weary lines of disappointment and grief. He made a thorough and minute examination, not missing a charred board, a stained inch of plaster. Tom let him go—there was no use explaining what the chief could see for himself. If Gordon would have anything to say to him, or Tony, he'd say it in his own time and manner.

The three men—Tom, Tony, and long, gaunt Clem Bradley—waited silently in Tom's office. Clem whittled a piece of soft pine into a neat pile of shavings on the corner of Tom's desk. Tom lay back in his chair, his hands folded behind his head, his eyes on the ceiling. Tony stood and looked out of the window, his eyes as blue as the salicylate bottle on the shelf at his shoulder. He wished Gordon would come along. He wished he hadn't sent for Clem. Not just at first. If the chief should crab . . . The insurance would care for the repairs. But, hell, they needed so much more than repairs. Ever since Tony had first come to Westwood, they'd needed a new wing. If Clem meant the business he seemed to mean . . .

When Gordon finally came, neither Tony nor Tom was ready for him. Both men stared at him speechlessly. It was Clem Bradley who got slowly to his feet, who held out his clean, rough hand to the chief surgeon.

"Sure had some bad luck, Doc."

"Yes. Yes, we did, Bradley. You'd think, with the Cypress Flats district waiting like tinder . . . And good riddance that would have been, too. How does your Sunday God explain these things, Clem?"

The tall man shifted his weight, grinned slowly. "He don't never bother to explain 'em, Doc. Jest lets 'em happen."

Gordon grunted. "Yes. He does. Tony? Hurt your eye?"

"Not bad. Ran into something, perhaps. I—we're sorry about the fire, Chief."

"You should be."

"We did all we could—"

"You did. Both of you. But it takes the wind out of our sails. You realize that."

"Yes. That's why—that's why I sent for Mr. Bradley."

"Eh?" Gordon swung around to look at Tony more directly. To look at Bradley. At Tom, accusingly.

"Tom, did you?"

Tom shrugged. "Give Tony the credit—starting right now. He's the lad who can pull himself—and us—out of a hole. I only wish I had been the one—let Bradley tell you about it, Chief."

"I'm in no mood..."

"You don't know what kind of mood you're in. Go on, Clem, tell him about you farmers wanting to go into the medical business."

Bradley looked doubtfully at Gordon, but since the chief remained silent, he dared to begin to speak. "We been workin' on this idee about two years, Doc. Seems like it's the thing to do—been done right well other places. Ought to work out here. We got the membership all lined up—been waiting the chance to put it up to you. Doctor McNeill seems to think the cash money we'd be ready to put in would do you more real good right now—"

"How much cash money?" Gordon sat down in the chair Tom surrendered to him. Tom went to stand beside Tony, his hand on the younger doctor's shoulder. Good work, Galahad, those pressing fingers said.

"About ten thousand dollars, Doc. I reckon we got about three thousand members in the whole 'sociation. Takes in a bit of territory. They stand ready to put in forty dollars a year a family to take care of them in addition to the ten thousand in stock in the hospital. It looks like a deal, don't it, Doc? We figure we take out insurance, we get men to tell us how to take care of our cows and grade our milk; we sure ought to be able to take care of being sick..."

They talked for two hours, these three men, without their dinners, absorbed, interested in the many details of this co-operative scheme. At one point, Gordon pounded his desk. Tom's desk.

"One thing your people have got to understand, Bradley. You can't buy—not with ten thousand, or any amount of money, a nickel's worth of control of the medical administration of this hospital. I'm boss here, and I intend to remain boss."

Clem Bradley swung one long leg up and over the other bony knee. Sat studying his long, flat foot in the heavy work shoe. "Sure, Doc," he said placatingly. "We know how you'd feel. And it's all right by us. We're farmers. You're doctors. We pay you to keep us well, ain't that right, Doctor Flannery?"

"That's the general idea," said Tom dryly. "What the Medical Society is going to say about it is another matter."

Gordon frowned. "That's right. Corporate medicine, all the damned rigmarole. . . . But, we'll think it over, Clem. And let you know."

The 'phone rang as Bradley shambled out. Gordon reached out his arm.

"Yes? This is Gordon—just got back. . . . Thanks, it wasn't so bad. . . . What? . . . That's very kind of you, Doctor Herbert." The chief's voice hardened, and Tom winked at Tony. "The hell we will! . . . Herbert, I'll be most obliged if you'll tell your sympathetic friends to mind their own damned business. Westwood can take care of itself." The receiver banged on the hook and Gordon sat back glaring.

"That. . . Herbert. He says, of course, under the circumstances, we'll have to abandon the syphilis clinic. He and his friends will do their best to carry on."

Flannery and Tony grunted simultaneously.

"Tony! Tom! We're going to build that new wing. Now. By Godfrey, if after all we've been through. . . I'll get in touch with an architect, a builder. Well, what are you two standing around here for? Don't we have any work to do in this hospital?"

Obediently, suppressing their grins, Tom and Tony left the office. Safely in the hall, they solemnly shook hands, and Tom broke into unrestrained laughter.

"You know, Tony, I don't see what we'd do without Herbert. Even with your brains and inspirations, it takes a first-class s.o.b. like him. Always, he pops up just at the right moment. Gordon's mad as hops now. He'll grab at the chance of Bradley's help."

"Yes, Tom. Still—if the town doctors. . . All but a few of them will raise hell over this. They'll throw us out of the Society. Some pretty bad things have happened."

"Sure. Maybe we'll have tough going for a while. The Society won't be much of a one in the town's estimation with Westwood out of it—especially a bigger and better Westwood."

"You really think these farmers mean business? That they have the money?"

Tom nodded. "Oh, yes. Or Bradley wouldn't have said they had. Bradley's smart—don't let his appearance fool you. Remember Lincoln. Or do you?"

Tony grinned. "I remember. I'm going to get some dinner." They stood for a minute on the back steps of the hospital. Tony's arm swept out in a swift, exultant gesture. "Tom! Do you know that this means that our whole scale of operations will be almost doubled—three thousand families, regular examinations, a real chance for preventive work, continuity of case histories, a mine of research material! Why, Tom, that means we'll be able to do a kind of job I'd never even dared to dream about."

Tom's eyebrows lifted. "Not too fast, Tony. Sure it'll be better. Better for Westwood, better for the farmers, better for Darcey. It will, provided we can survive the fifty-seven varieties of medico-political and other head-

aches we're going to have from now on. It'll be better, but it will still be a long way this side of Utopia. What's more—and not so good—it leaves at least a third of the population still on the outside looking in."

"You mean the Flats."

"Yes. And the mining town over in the north-east corner of the county. If you'd care to look at that, it would make Cypress Flats seem like a model-town development. I was in there a few times with old Saunders; they hang the food from the ceiling to fool the cockroaches, and you scoop the bedbugs off the walls with a shovel. What's the use of throwing medical care, good or bad, into human cesspools like those? Tear the lousy shacks down and burn them—then, maybe yes. But who's going to pay for it? Or, for that matter, what happens to the broke farmrenters that won't be able to go in on Bradley's scheme? Assuming it goes through. Or the ten and twenty dollar-a-week clerks and labourers around this town?"

Tony sighed. "You make it look pretty hopeless, Tom. Yet it was you who first put me on to Bradley and this scheme. You backed the syphilis clinic..." Tony brightened, and pointed an accusing finger. "Why, you're nothing but a dreamy-eyed Galahad yourself, if the truth is known!"

"Faugh!" Flannery's intellectual cynicism was quick to reject the tribute. "It's just that I'm caught, as Gordon is caught and you are caught—every doctor is caught—between the fantastic ethical pretensions of medical science and the actualities of American life. The world envisaged by the ideals of science is as balmily unreal as Plato's *Republic*. If there's one ethos that human life does not observe, and probably never will, it's the ethos of science. Yet we go on, we doctors reciting our Hippocratic Oath, and, believe it or not, thousands of us all over the country come awfully close to practising it—those that can take it."

"So you recommend," suggested Tony, slyly, "that I show a little common sense like Hazeltine, or Herbert, and stop taking it. Is that the idea, Tom?"

"Huh?" Flannery's bushy eyebrows scowled beligerently. "I'll knock your handsome block off if you try it!" Then, as he saw Tony's spreading grin, "No, Tony. You've been through the wars. You'll take it. That's your high privilege, and Gordon's and mine. It's the only thing in the world that makes this damned profession of ours worth while."

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